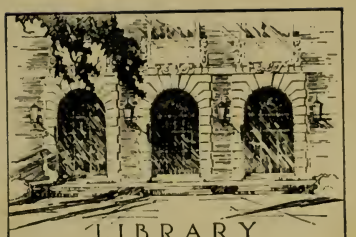
VIOLET MOSES

By
Leonard Merrick



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VIOLET MOSES

BY

LEONARD MERRICK

AUTHOR OF "MR. BAZALGETTE'S AGENT"

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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VIOLET MOSES.

CHAPTER IX.

"How are you, Violet?" he said, kissing her. "So you've come to see the long-lost father at last."

"I didn't hear a ring," said Emilia, boldly; "how strange, we were all listening for it, too."

"That's your Aunt Emilia, and this is your Aunt Sophie, the long-lost father's sisters; and here's your grandmamma, Violet!"

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Dyas,

tepidly, tendering a wrinkled cheek. "You were not such a big girl when I saw you last, young lady."

"I suppose you don't remember any of us, do you?" asked Sophie.

"How time flies; doesn't she make us feel old; isn't it r'dic'lous! Take off your things; oh! throw them down anywhere."

"And she's not going to be worried with questions," declared Robert, assuming a light comedy manner that sat well on him. "People come off a long journey, and then they're besieged with a volley of inquiries to make them welcome. Take this chair, and get warm, and if they keep putting a lot of conundrums to you just tell them not to bother."

"A fire is almost a welcome in itself, I think," answered Violet, softly. "It seems to say, 'Well, here I am waiting for you,

you see. You and I are going to be friends right off, aren't we?' And this is a beauty, quite a big friend."

"When you've rested I'll show you your room, or would you sooner go now?" Sophie said.

"*Will* you let the girl alone?" demanded Robert, laughing. "Isn't it marvellous the mania women have for running you off your feet the moment you arrive anywhere! A man pushes you into an arm-chair, pitches his cigar-case at you, and says, 'Now, make yourself at home;' but women—if they have their way you'll be forced to do a tour of inspection through the entire house before you get a chance to sit down. Emilia, your only brother wants a cigarette!"

"Here you are, you beauty! Abuse the women when you're well, but wait till your finger aches, don't you fly to us

then? You're an ungrateful set, you men!"

"Fetch me a light, and talk less. Violet, I get no respect here; we shall have to move."

"I presume you're aware you are spoiling your tea, smoking now?" remarked Sophie. "You won't be able to eat anything. Throw it away, there's a good boy."

"Shan't," he said, blithely, "Bobbie's defiant."

"*Obstinatus!*"

"Are we going to have tea earlier this evening?" said Emilia; "who told cook?"

"I did; it will be ready directly."

"Oh, then," said Violet, "I think I'd like to go to my room now, if I may. I feel an awful disgrace as I am. I can rest when I come down, you know," she explained, turning to her father with a smile.

"Oh, milord! observe him being deferred to," Emilia exclaimed, facetiously. "Isn't he sweet on himself and his new authority! Nobody else will get a look in."

"Yes, isn't he proud," agreed Sophie; "he won't even let the child wash her hands when she wants to. Unnatural par-ient! Come on, Violet, don't you mind what he says, we'll protect you! Would you like your luggage at once, or shall the servant bring it up for you afterwards?"

"Afterwards will do, thanks," she returned; "my *toilette* won't take me long."

"And while we're gone," her aunt added, "perhaps the par-ient will exert himself so far as to say they are to make haste with the banquet, we're starving!"

They were never "hungry" in this

establishment, and never "thirsty"—they were always "starving" or "gaspingly dry." Also, all their words beyond the most ordinary were either abbreviated or endowed with redundant syllables, being in the latter case pronounced with a grimace, as if in protest that such "high flown" expressions should be permitted to exist. Pretended illiterateness was held to be indispensable to wit, and nobody would have thought of trying to be funny and grammatical at the same time. Indeed, exaggeration and a systematic disregard of every rule insisted on by Lindley Murray had grown to be so thoroughly accepted by them as the essence of homely parlance, that when a stranger spoke correctly in their midst, or referred to a real number of babies, pies, or miles, instead of alluding wildly to a collection of fourteen or ninety-

nine, they said amongst themselves he was "very extr'ord'n'ry!"

A boy who had been reared in this household, and then sent out into the world, would have found, to his astonishment, he had as much to unlearn as to acquire. He would have borne himself at first like a conceited savage, impregnated with distorted ideas and erroneous opinions which could not have failed to inspire him with a lofty pity or bewildered contempt for person after person with whom he was brought in contact, until he at length mastered a fact of which the Dyas family was supremely ignorant: that the notions which repeatedly seemed so absurd were the notions of mankind, and the eccentricity was contained in the crack-brained dogmas laid down as gospel between the four walls in Virginia Square.

"How pretty she is!" remarked Robert, as the door closed. "By Jove, isn't she? Talk about the professional beauties' likenesses in the Grove, she's better looking than the whole crowd of 'em."

"I don't admire the infantile fashion she does her hair in, though," cavilled Emilia. "I wonder Bertha Carroll hadn't got more sense than to let her wear it hanging all over the place like that; she isn't in short skirts!"

"Well, she's very young, after all."

"She's more than seven."

"Of course, *my* opinion is not asked," murmured Mrs. Dyas, sarcastically. "I am nobody, as usual!"

Her son, who on those rare occasions when he did allow himself the luxury of abusing a person openly instead of in secret was not to be easily conciliated, responded

to this intended overture by a glance merely, but Emilia proved more gracious, and was accordingly informed, her niece was exceedingly beautiful.

"Lovely, I call her, a lovely girl! Her mother was never fit to hold a candle to her, and if you aren't a greater fool than I think you, Mr. Robert, for all your nasty tongue, your daughter 'll make a fine match."

Such a possibility had struck him five minutes ago, and he suffered himself to smile, flattered by the grudging testimony to his shrewdness.

"If we talk about that in another two or three years, it 'll do," he said, languidly; "and, besides, where's she to meet him? We don't move in Mayfair, and I don't fancy she 'd take kindly to the music-hall stage. A girl may have the appearance of

a duchess, and if she isn't in the right groove it's not worth a cent to her, believe *me*."

He had a habit of inserting "believe me" in his sentences. It was a phrase he had picked up on the diamond fields, where its use is as unavailing as it is frequent, insomuch as the speaker is generally esteemed a liar anyhow. Delivered with a faint accentuation of the "lieve," and the pronoun well in italics, however, it is both in the Cape and its native Whitechapel considered a "gran' set-off to conversation."

"Did you ever see anything more r'dic'lous than the way that girl wears her hair?" cried Sophie, who now bustled in to embrace the opportunity for a gossip. "'Pon my word, somebody ought to tell her of it; it's like a child's."

"What on earth's the odds," he demurred; "first Emilia, and then you. I'm sure it looks all right."

"Ought to have done it up ages ago," she persisted, *sotto voce.* "Well, what do you think of her?"

"Mother says, 'lovely,'" he replied, thus intimating that a peace had been effected during her absence, "'a beautiful girl!'"

"Oh, do you think so, mother? She does startle you at the beginning, but . . . there's something extr'ord'n'ry somewhere . . . I don't know . . . there's a peculiarity about the lower part of the face . . . she keeps her lips closed, and they're very full . . . and it sends her face out about a yard and a half."

"I'll tell you what I don't like"—Emilia's turn again—"the way she talks; it's like a girl in a book rather—what the

fire said, and what she said to the fire! Good Lord!"

"Oh!" groaned Sophie, clasping her hands in an ecstasy of mirth. "What did you . . . eh? I didn't know where to look, 'pon my soul, didn't know where to look; I wanted to laugh. Reg'lar *ingénue* in a play business, wasn't it . . . thought she was commencing to recite!"

"The widow gushes, you know," said Emilia; "no doubt the child has got it from her. I remember at the wedding . . ."

"Let us leave the wedding out of the discussion, please," Robert interrupted, elevating his eyebrows and tugging at his moustache in the manner of most men when they feel that something is required of them, and do not know what to say. "Mother, the teapot's up."

The spinsters exchanged signals signifying respectively, "Dear me, how sensitive," and "Hoity toity, since when?" and then Violet came in, and everybody beamed.

"I haven't kept you waiting," she questioned, "have I?"

"Never trouble on that score," he explained; "nobody waits for anybody here. We all suit our own convenience and go to the table or leave it just as our humour prompts."

"Everything's getting cold," commented Emilia, abruptly. "Now, then, mother, don't go to sleep. Violet, sit there. Sugar?"

"Yes, please; two pieces."

"Milk?"

"Thanks!"

Mrs. Dyas, who had raised her head in

the new-born hope of hearing one or the other of these delicacies declined, relapsed into reverie, exercised in her mind as to whether the second acceptance would or would not necessitate an extra halfpenny-worth per diem. She had become in eight years, reflected Robert, whom few details escaped, a very mean and disagreeable old party indeed. He bitterly recalled the period when she used to press him to take "more beer." One pleasantry alone, one solitary unhallowed jest did Violet's grandmamma contribute to the forced festivity of that meal: it was in dispensing the liver and bacon which had been procured in honour of the event. She balanced a rasher on the knife, and observed with undeniable truth:

"You won't get meat for tea every evening, young lady."

After which, amidst the sudden clatter of Emilia's cups and saucers, somebody exclaimed in a tone of surprise:

"Where's father?"

"Oh, yes," echoed Sophie, her tone implying his absence was a personal affront, "where's father? Isn't it a mirac'lous thing that father's always late?"

At this juncture, and before Susan could be despatched in his quest, there entered in carpet slippers and a frock coat much too large for him, a little old man. The extent of shirt-front displayed by his ancient garment, coupled with the pallor of its seams, conveyed the impression that he had bought it at maturity and occupied himself during the succeeding years by excessive shrivelling. His face was clean shaved, and his skull twinkled in its bareness, being perfectly bald save for an

inch or two of snow-white hair which fell in flakes over each ear like feathers. He stood for an instant clutching the voluminous coat with both hands in the region of his waist, and slowly wriggling from right to left inside it. The abject misery suggested by this forlorn method of warming himself paragraphs would be inadequate to convey.

"Phin," said his wife, sharply, "come and have your tea."

"My darling?"

"Come and have your tea!"

"Yes, my love," murmured the little old man, "certainly."

He surveyed the company with a watery gaze, evidently perplexed by the addition, and moved deprecatingly towards his seat as if, Violet inwardly decided, he expected to be "booed at."

"This is Violet," said Emilia.

"Oh, indeed?" he responded, feebly.

"Robert's child, Violet; she's come from Chester."

"Eh? Bless my soul, how are you, my dear. Robert's child! Well, well!"

He would have got up, but the girl rose swiftly, and crossed to his side, forcing him back into his place.

"I am quite well, thank you," she answered, simply, "I have only been here about half-an-hour."

The knot in her throat which she had been fighting against all day grew hard again at once. His evident ignorance of her invitation embarrassed her and made her pity him. Was he of no importance, then? Everybody seemed to boast more authority than he — his wife, his daughters, his son whom they called "Bobbie," as if he

were an infant in shoulder-knots, all of them! What did it mean? In the small section of society with which she had been acquainted, the father, when there was one, had been the head of the house; here he was manifestly a cipher! How long was she to remain, she wondered; surely it was not to be her home for good? She bent over her plate and conjectured what Mrs. Carroll would be doing at the moment in Powis Lodge; speculated whether she was in the dining or the drawing-room, if she was reading or working. What a distance away it was, the dear old peaceful town; what an age—computed by emotions—since she had quitted it! A vision of Bertha as she had seen her last, waving a handkerchief on the platform and trying to smile, came before her, and the knot swelled to a lump so that she could scarcely swallow.

Oh, if something—that indefinite, impossible "something" which we all of us long for in unhappiness—would only happen to take her back . . . to-morrow . . . to-night! She fancied her sensations on beholding the station, her delight in hailing the fly, Mrs. Carroll's astonishment and rapture as unannounced she walked in upon her solitude, and flung her arms round her neck; and the lump dwindled, and she wrung her fingers in excitement under the table-cloth.

That night she was told not to stand upon ceremony if she felt tired, but to go to bed early; and when she unpacked her aunt's photograph in her apartment, she listened to a series of imaginary admonitions designed for her guidance. She was with relations; he was her father, and she was behaving wrongly to regret; if he knew he would be wounded! Only . . . only—the

objection would occur—why had not Bertha been mentioned? The gap between the present and the past might have been so abridged if they had talked about it!

That was it, if they had talked about it! It is the keynote to nine-tenths of our sorrows, that silence of apathy or of mistaken kindness. We follow the train of our ideas by stealth in the midst of incongruous chatter, and look forward to our hours of solitude, that we may hug our woe yet closer, until it becomes at last the moral hump which disfigures the straightness of our mental attitude. We could not banish it if we would by-and-by, and all because "they wouldn't talk about it." She would have grown accustomed to the change far more quickly if someone had said, "How great the change must be!"

The next afternoon any doubt that she

had had about the proposed duration of her stay was dispelled, and she understood she was to consider herself permanently installed.

"You know, Violet," said her father, chattily, "your grandmother is not particularly well off, and she couldn't have afforded to receive you excepting on the condition that I paid a small sum—a pound a week—for your keep! My circumstances just now are not brilliant either, or the interest of your money would not be touched for your maintenance . . . er . . . I should draw it instead of your Aunt Bertha now it's I who am going to take charge of you, naturally (in accordance with the terms of the will); but, believe *me*, if I were in the position I used to be in it would be . . . er . . . a bagatelle, something for your gloves and candies!"

His shifty blue eyes wandered from chromo to chromo; nothing is more dis-

concerting than a steadfast gaze fixed upon you when you are struggling for euphemisms.

Nevertheless, the allusion to his earlier "position" had been skilful; it immediately inspired her with compassion, and reminded her that to him also this home was an alteration.

"I mean that as we're all down on our luck, mother has a right to expect to be paid, and—you're no child, you're a woman—you see where it's got to come from!"

"Why, of course, isn't she entitled to it if I live in her house! And, really, I seldom think of the money as mine at all, do you know!"

"You will when you are twenty-one," he laughed, "if you don't now! By the way, what were the arrangements in Chester, what did you draw for private

expenses, for instance? I'm all at sea till I hear from Mr. Fin . . . Finel . . ."

"Finlason! Yes, he said he would have to write to you. Oh, I myself spent very little, indeed, auntie bought all my things; and you can't imagine how she used to moan and groan at taking those wretched dividends, though hers is a tiny annuity, and she's far from wealthy! At the last min . . ." Here she stopped short, checked by the horrible thought that what she was saying sounded like instituting comparisons, and she must unwittingly have cut her father to the quick. She blushed scarlet, and he contemplated her awhile with quiet amusement.

"And now you've come to a father and a grandmamma who haven't groaned once," he observed playfully, after a pause, "eh?"

Shame for her *gaucherie* overwhelmed her; such benignity, such forgiveness, the

serenity with which he converted a stupidity too glaring to admit of pretended denseness into a joke, stabbed her to the heart. She almost crouched on the sofa in her repentance, and the kindliness of his voice brought the tears into her eyes.

Yet her tongue was tied. She knew what she wished to utter, and could not utter it; it was instinct warning her that the words which would have burst forth so spontaneously in Powis Lodge, must in her new surroundings fall curiously out of place. Not long ago she had debated with semi-terror the prospect of an unmet parent's caresses; now she was vaguely conscious, although she shrank from acknowledging any fault in his behaviour even to herself, that the lack of endearments was responsible for the restraint. He was superlatively good-humoured, she felt, but he was not

demonstrative; and it is easy to undervalue the necessity for a fresh affection when one is still rich in an all-sufficient love, but deprived of the all-sufficient love one's appetite for fresh affection is prodigious. She would have liked him to take her to him at this crisis and say, "Girlie, you and I have a lot to learn about each other; help me to understand you!" He was perfectly aware, by reason of the sentiment in his disposition, that some such step would have been the proper course, but while sentiment would have enabled him to address her with tenderness and fluency, if she had been the daughter of another man, a deeper feeling was demanded to prevail against an inbred fear of "gushing" with his own.

"What I was going to tell you," she said turning to him at length, "was that at the last minute Aunt Bertha pushed a letter

into my hand to open in the train, and inside were—these!"

She took out of her purse two bank notes for one hundred pounds each, and the adventurer's pulses leaped.

"Will you keep them for me?" she continued, piteously; "I don't want them a bit; only the poor dear writes her expenses have been lessened by the annual hundred and twenty she received while I was with her, and so she enclosed the . . . 'the total amount thus saved,' which she gives to me for my own use, in case I ever require it!"

"Well, *cela va sans dire*," he answered, soothingly, "all that I overlooked!"

In point of fact, it was precisely what he had done, since a contingency arising from the scruples of integrity it was not in the man to conceive, but he invariably employed the term "overlook" to mean "foresee," and,

welcome as the surprise had been, elected to lie in preference to letting the girl think it possible so shrewd a personage as he was could be surprised at all. *Enfin*, there was some compensation for his enforced delay in the States: if he had claimed her earlier there would not have been any ready money, and as it was, he "overlooked" a delightful vista of suits of clothes made for him this time by the tailor he had patronized in his prosperity. Did he owe him anything? No, he recollected it was one of the few bills he had paid!

"You must have some new dresses out of this extensive capital," he went on; "girls always like new dresses, don't they? and you're too good looking to be stinted in your wardrobe. We'll make a real swell of you now you've come to London! I say . . . . I wouldn't mention to your grand-

mamma the fact of your having anything beyond the income. You aren't a fool, Violet, if you take after your father," he swayed gently to and fro on the hearthrug, and wagged his head sapiently; "and, take my word for it, when I advise, I know! . . . er . . . mother's a very nice woman when things go all right, but when people are economizing, the more they can get the better it suits them. Eh! I'm talking to you like this because I can see you're clever —oh, yes, I don't make compliments. I can sum up a person in a second, and when you arrived last night, I said to myself, 'That's a shrewd woman!'"

"I'll do exactly what you wish, of course," she replied, a trifle dazed by this style of instructions; "but if I shall cost my grandmother more than a pound a week oughtn't she to have more?"

"Bah!" he rejoined lightly, "in this world it's every man for himself, and God for us all. If you can get your board for a pound a week why offer a guinea? Those are very 'young' ideas, Violet . . . Yes, we all have them once, but we learn as we grow! I remember the time when if a man wanted to sell me an article very badly, and I knew it was worth double what he was willing to take, it appeared to me wrong to deal with him at his own price; now, the harder up he was the less I would part! We have these fantastic notions at the beginning, but, take my word for it, they're weak. You rob or you're robbed in business —the 'cute man robs!"

"And my grandfather," she faltered, beginning to feel as if she had been transported to a new sphere; "what of him? Is it to be a secret from him, too?"

"Secret! it isn't a question of secrets; you merely say nothing, you keep your own counsel. You have a hundred and twenty a year, interest on the four thousand pounds the doctor left you, Violet. 'Yes, grandmamma!' That's all; it's very simple! Besides, she won't ask you anything, there's nothing to ask. As for your grandfather, you'll see him as you did at breakfast this morning, or at tea yesterday; he's got a little back room where he sits all day and smokes, you needn't trouble your mind about him; he's a nuisance occasionally, but he's very old, and . . . and nobody takes any notice of him. Your aunts you can tell, they don't matter!"

She was relieved to hear that some of the members were true to each other, at any rate; but the gone-to-boarding-school sensation for which she had been reproaching

herself, waxed stronger rapidly, and now, without correction. It was worse than a boarding-school, for the vacations were undetermined.

"About Aunt Bertha," she said, "I should like to visit her very often; I shall miss her horribly."

"Yes, I suppose you will, at first. Well, it must be managed somehow, that's not difficult; there's always a way to get to everything if we look for it! Don't worry yourself; if you want to go to Chester now and again, you can go; but, take it from me, in six months the desire will never occur to you!"

"I was too young when my mother died to have been a companion to her, father," she answered, steadily, "and Aunt Bertha has filled her place. The dearest mother could be no dearer to me than she, and if I did forget her in six months, or in six years,

or as long as I live, I should deserve to be despised!"

Her father's amiability was tinged with weariness.

"And when you marry?" he retorted with a shrug, "and when you marry? When you've got a husband and children? My dear girl, there never was, and there never will be, any human being upon earth so constant as we are up to the time we're twenty; there never was and there never will be—we are fidelity personified."

"And then——" she said.

"And then," he assured her with a cheerful nod, "we gradually discover that the only thing it's worth while being staunch to is our own convenience!"

"I hope I shall never make that discovery, father. I hope I shall be constant to my conceptions of right and wrong! They

were surely not given to us to be discarded as soon as we reach an age when they are almost our only monitors?"

He was becoming less sure that his sisters had been in error when they declared she "talked like a book." She was doubtful whether the geniality which had impressed her so favourably was an indisputable testimony of a good heart, after all. Yet might not the cynicism be assumed, she argued; to be obliged to condemn one's father—that would be fearful. The pair were equally glad when Sophie disturbed them.

Life has been aptly compared to a kaleidoscope; the simile is so happy that the kaleidoscope might have been invented for the sake of the *bon mot*. Both have their set-scenes in which each particle fulfils its helpless *rôle*, juggled by an in-

visible destiny, scenes brilliant, incongruous, depressing; both own their swift unlooked-for changes, their dethronements of the beautiful, their triumphs of the hideous; both—the world of life and the world of glass—alike revolve indifferent to the reverses they contain. They resemble each other once more insomuch as neither points a moral.

A girl with high ideals, great of soul, born of one conscientious woman and reared by another, is transplanted to an atmosphere of vulgar meanness and ignoble thoughts. This girl must suffer, even if she does not deteriorate—nevertheless, she has done no wrong. Every opinion spoken, every sentiment enunciated must jar upon her—nevertheless, she has committed no fault. She has made no mistake, perpetrated no heedless act, but innocent as

she is, she must suffer, her ideality must suffer, body and mind she must suffer. Why? Why are those boys and women yonder jostling, panting, sinking in their race for bread? Why is that baby's face loathsome to contemplate so that the guilty father shrinks from her in infancy, and men shudder as she grows to womanhood, dragging out the chain of her repulsive fate, a thing foredoomed? Why are children stealing in our streets to assuage the pangs of hunger gnawing at their entrails? Why? Because on this earth it is the law of consequence that we expiate the follies of other people! Because innocence, which may protect us in a court of justice, is no exemption from punishment in the trial of life. Because that child accused of theft is a martyr to the animal indulgence whose bequest was the power to feel

hungry, and the fingers to close around a loaf. That is why! And let us open our eyes to it, and babble less of our "beautiful world!" Rather let us cry, appalled by this eternal edict, "The world is *not* beautiful, how can we make it better!" As the acorn generates the oak, so does each of our actions beget result. As the oak showers down the acorns, so does this result divide and scatter itself upon the stream of posterity, drifting to our children and our children's children. Gigantic beyond conjecture, and without end, the River of Result is rolling on, and poor-houses are built to stem it, but they are too narrow to serve; and gaols are reared to check it, and it fills the gaols and pours past. And the source of the river is primal error, and from its mouth float forth the bodies of the victims it has drowned.

Build ye a cottage on its banks in your contentment, for on its banks ye can but dwell, and let the vines trail freshly round your casements, for their fruit is rich and sweet. But dream not in your haven of an hour that result may be avoided, since as surely as the water flows gaily in sunshine by our doors—your doors and mine—its fountain is in ages that we never knew, and out of sight the current now may bear the unsuspected burden of another's fault to cast upon our peace.

CHAPTER X.

By degrees the girl shook down into the routine of the establishment where she found herself. Virginia Square, which may be Westbourne Park, Bayswater, or Notting Hill, whichever the taste of its inhabitants leads them to suppose will look best at the top of their note-paper, lies concealed in a maze of private streets between the fustian of the Portobello Road and the *pseudo-chic* of Westbourne Grove. It is nearer to the fustian—so near, that on Saturday nights when the Portobello Road is transformed to an *al fresco* market

illumined by much paraffin, the roar of the Portobelligerents is ofttimes "wafted by a favouring gale" across its chimneys—but "the Grove" is, nevertheless, accessible, and its shop windows are quite the Virginians' standard of style and excellence. The spinsters trod its pavements each fine morning with religious regularity, and Violet accompanied them, criticized the bonnets, and returned with them to dinner; in the afternoons, while the others slept, she practised her singing, and invaded the sanctum of her grandfather, where her earliest intrusion had been an unparalleled event, and she was now awaited with childish eagerness; in the evenings she listened rather than contributed to the conversation which grew less and less restrained as the novelty of her presence here wore off. Thus the weeks went by.

Two new dresses were bought for her, and she heard Sophie tell Mrs. Dyas they had been among the things brought in the trunks from Chester, whereat she paled and said nothing, only she thought, and asked herself what manner of family was this. Her writing she abandoned; once she had gone up to her bedroom for the purpose of commencing a tale, but the sensation produced had been so marked, and the ridicule of her "eccentricity" so thinly veiled, that she preferred to put the amusement aside sooner than to confront such a fire of interrogatories and sneers again. She compensated herself for its loss, by sending budgets to Mrs. Carroll, withholding, however, much that would have been bad news, and saying simply, "I miss you, dear," not "I am unhappy."

At the beginning of the new year she

went "home" to see her, comforting her in a sad affliction—no less than the loss of Dandy, the spaniel, and the two days she spent there were full of sweetness to both aunt and niece. "Isn't it like old times," they kept exclaiming, and when people cry, "Isn't it like old times," they always mean, "Isn't it delightful"!

During the visit she heard that Allan Morris had left for London shortly after her own departure, but Mrs. Carroll had not given him the address, nor did she know anything of his book, though she concluded that if it had come out he would certainly have sent a copy to Powis Lodge.

On her return to the metropolis, Violet made a point of perusing the advertisements of recent publications in "The Telegraph," and was eventually rewarded by the sight

of the announcement she sought. It was already spring when the work she had discussed with the author so frequently made its appearance, and she borrowed it from a neighbouring library which declares itself in connection with Mudie's, and which positively does have a new novel sometimes, though not often. She thought the story clever; Sophie and Emilia pronounced it "twaddle"; the reviews, or such of them as she saw, considered it "promising"; and the sour-visaged female, who is the limited library's presiding deity, informed her that there was no demand for it. Violet sighed, recalling the writer's hopes and divining his disappointment.

"The Grove" was now gay with flower-sellers and their baskets, and she wove quite a little work of fiction on her own account at this period, inspired by a girl

who sold daffodils at the corner of the Hereford Road, and the boy who stood on the curb next to her, his commodity the latest contrivance in the shape of a penny toy, which he offered with repeated assurances that "A dog couldn't break it! a cat couldn't break it! a dog, cat, or child couldn't break it!" while so surely as he took a coin the daffodil lassie beamed. Violet was quite convinced they were sweethearts, speculated if those long brass earrings had been the toy-dealer's gift, and scented a rival in the air-ball man, who did a large business on her heroine's left. One afternoon when she was mentally trying to immortalize this romance of the curbstone in easy metre in the dining-room, her father startled all the occupants, and shattered the ballad's chances, by a piece of intelligence of the most enthralling order.

He had been on some trifling mission to the City, and, it seemed, while lunching at the Chesterfield Restaurant, had encountered a half-forgotten acquaintance who had known him when he had been "somebody" in Hatton Garden—a Spaniard, by name Iglesias. This Iglesias was "company mad," had a scheme for erecting a casino on the Spanish coast, to be conducted like that of Monte Carlo, and was full of it. His brother was on the spot, they had a concession from the Government, and for five thousand pounds could purchase the necessary land. Could Dyas be of any use in getting it underwritten?

Now, years ago, Robert Dyas had been intimate with a Jewish stockbroker who was to-day a power, and no vulgar curiosity as to the genuineness of the undertaking delayed his affirmative. He said

he was "Thick as thieves with Leopold Moses."

Iglesias jumped. "He was the man of all others for the purpose. Everything he had floated in the last six months was at a premium. Did Dyas really know him well?"

On this Violet's papa had, by his own showing, waxed more gloriously mendacious still. "He and Moses were hand and glove! When Moses had been a 'nothing,' who had pitchforked him into a billet and taught him what to do? He had! He did not wish to brag, but, take his word for it, he had only to say, 'Leopold, you've got to do so-and-so for *me*, you understand, for *me*,' and it would be done! And why? Well, he did not refer to bygones—the past was past—but, believe him, it would be done, and because Moses remembered!" Then he

had leaned back in his chair, and stroked his hay-coloured moustache so complacently that Iglesias felt the architect of Leopold Moses's fortunes was before him.

He next ordered a bottle of Heidsieck —as befitting a patron who was rapidly squandering his daughter's two hundred pounds—and proceeded to extol his qualifications to pull the thing through. In a sentence, he would vouch for the directors—"solid and substantial, my boy, no guinea-pigs"—draw up the prospectus, articles, etc., and guarantee the underwriting, providing—here was the point—it was made worth his while.

The conference was a protracted one; Robert's "while" proved dear. Nevertheless, when they had emptied the bottle, it was decided that if the company should go through, owing to his instrumentality, he

was to be an equal partner in the sum the foreigner received as purchase-money, after all preliminary expenses had been defrayed.

A waiter was despatched for a sheet of paper and a stamp, and an agreement framed over subsequent cigarettes and coffee.

When Mr. Dyas issued from the Chesterfield Restaurant, and jauntily hailed a hansom to bear him Westbourne Parkward, it had been with the exhilarating responsibility of seeing Moses on the morrow and mooting the project of the Salvador Casino Company in the stockbroker's ear.

The two adventurers proposed to sell the land and the concession for a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, the capital to be two hundred and fifty thousand in two hundred and fifty thousand one-pound shares, of which

they, as vendors, would take fifty thousand in part payment of the purchase-money. Fifty thousand pounds was to be the inducement offered to Moses—a sum debated lengthily before it was determined—twenty thousand pounds in shares and thirty thousand in cash, the latter to be paid out of the moneys they received, and, altogether, it was exactly the kind of business adapted to Dyas's taste. He risked not a cent, the company would be a big "go," and—warming with his narrative—the dividends from such a source would be a fortune alone. Upon his soul, he did not think he would dispose of a single share! Sophie, mix your brother some whiskey and water!

The following morning he accordingly drove to Throgmorton Street, and, needless to say, the result of the interview was awaited by his relatives with feverish im-

patience. All that day nothing was talked of in the Dyas *ménage* but the prospects of the Salvador Casino Company, Limited. The spinsters bordered upon delirium in their anxiety, and the noise of each passing vehicle begot a rush to the window in the hope it might have brought the incipient Crœsus back.

At dusk he appeared. His eyes were red; his gait as he entered suffered slightly from copious libations in town. Sophie and Emilia glanced at one another in mute suspense and trembled; were the libations the toasts of triumphs or the consequences of despair? As for Violet, having no experience in the vagaries of intoxication, she supposed he was tired. Mrs. Dyas pushed her spectacles up on her forehead, discarded the periodical she had been skimming, and said sharply:

"Well?"

His first words dispelled unpleasant doubts; he was garrulous in the extreme.

"I've seen Moses, it'll be all right, girls! Violet, you're going to have a wealthy father; mother, dear, embrace your son!"

"Oh!" gasped Sophie. "Yes? Go on, ducky!"

"Don't disturb yourself. I tell you I saw Moses. I soon reminded him who I was; and when I came away we were like brothers!"

"Isn't it lovely!" interjected Emilia.

"Like brothers we were! I couldn't go into details properly in the office, clients kept running in, but he said to me: 'Look here, Dyas,' he said, 'you see how it is. I haven't got a moment's peace here; let us make an appointment so that you and I can talk this thing over quietly!' The

long and the short of it is I've asked him to come up to us to-morrow evening!"

He paused to give the statement due effect, and to relish the chorus of astonishment.

"I don't want Iglesias," he continued, "we'll get Moses by himself, to begin with, and he can meet Iglesias later. Of course, he harps a good deal on the concession, says he must see that is correct before he moves a step in the affair—naturally, all that I overlooked; but if the concession is right he says there'll be no difficulty in getting the company underwritten, not a bit!"

"You little 'Wonder!'" laughed Sophie, who was scarcely able to contain her ecstasy. "Ain't he a little 'Wonder?' he'll be a millionnaire yet!"

"Believe *me*," he responded, "and the

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secret is . . . " he jerked his head to and fro for nearly a minute, and everybody listened for the secret, "believe *me!*" he concluded.

"You don't miss many opportunities, do you, Bobbie!"

He smiled.

"I remember," he said, presently, drifting into general reminiscences of his achievements, "I remember once being stone broke—as broke as they make 'em—and there was some young idiot in the hotel with me, crazy for backing horses in a small way. Do you know what I did: I sent myself a wire recommending a rank outsider as the next day's winner. Do you see?"

Violet waited expectantly in silence.

Sophie answered: "No," she said, "I may be dense, but I can't say I do!"

"Good Lord," he murmured, compassionately, yet with forbearance, "these manœuvres are not complicated! When the wire was delivered I showed it confidentially to the muff! 'Willie,' I exclaimed, 'this tip's a certainty. I'm going to back it all I'm worth; shall I do anything for you?' 'Yes,' he said, 'put a pony on for me, Dyas!' Of course I did nothing of the kind; the horse didn't even get a place; and there were twenty-five pounds in my pocket. Very simple!"

The girl's blood froze in her veins, and left her cold as ice. It was the earliest avowal of his downright dishonesty she had comprehended, and for the time being she could neither move nor speak. She sat paralyzed, her eyes riveted upon his bloodless face in horror. When the buzz of admiration he had occasioned subsided

he proceeded to relate another instance of his acumen, and once more his daughter hung on the syllables as they fell, numbed, stricken, and unnoticed while the scoundrel babbled joyously on the hearthrug.

He told how, equally hard up in Chicago, he had once gone into the First National Bank, and ascertained he was safe in his (imaginary) transactions with a certain Fillibert P. Beechley, after which he had had some visiting-cards engraved with Beechley's name, and a week or two later marched into a big jewellery store where he selected a lady's watch and chain for a hundred dollars. "When the fellow had packed it up," he explained, "I did a performance: ''m it, I've no money with me! Well, never mind, here's a cheque, only wants filling in, that will do; and, say, I'm pressed for time, I may as well

make it for four hundred. I guess you've no objection to cashing it? Deduct the amount of the purchase; here's my card!' 'We don't do business that way, how am I to tell your cheque will be honoured; I don't know you!' 'Oh, indeed,' I answered, loftily, 'you don't know me, don't you, my friend? Have the goodness to take that card and my cheque to your employer, sir, and say you have refused to accept it!' I waited about five minutes quite coolly, and then the fellow came back with the three hundred dollars in greenbacks, and full of apologies: 'I beg your pardon, here is the money, Mr. Beechley; I hope you'll think no more of what I said, sir; you see, we're bound to be careful?' 'Why, certainly,' I said, 'of course you were right in a way, only a smart storekeeper

avoids insulting the wrong people! Be sure there's no delay in sending that watch and chain round now. I'm not going home, and I want it to reach the house before luncheon. Good morning.'"

"The head of the firm knew Mr. Beechley's name?" cried Emilia.

"Not at all," replied her brother; "while I waited they had telephoned through to the bank, and inquired if Fillibert P. Beechley was good for four hundred dollars, and the bank had telephoned back 'Yes, and good for four thousand too!'"

"How clever!" commented Sophie; "wasn't it bright?"

"And the watch and chain," asked Emilia, "if you didn't take it with you, where did that go?"

"The watch and chain might go to Hades," responded Mr. Dyas, pleasantly, "for anything I cared! To leave them to be sent, looked genuine, and I made three hundred dollars cash, and cleared to New York."

His mother wiped away a tear of pride. "What an intellect!" she said.

"Yes," he added, turning with abrupt jocoseness, "you haven't got a duffer for a governor, Violet. What do you say to that, young woman?"

"Oh," cried Emilia, who had forgotten her niece was there, and now perceived how pale she had grown, "let the girl alone, Bobbie. Here, I want to know something."

"And why," he retorted, facetiously—"why should I not address my own *che-ild* if I choose, the offspring of the only *gyurl*

I ever loved? Violetta, you have a talented father; take it from me."

Her disgust found voice. She had never spoken more distinctly in her life, though her knees were shaking:

"I would rather have had an honest one!" she said.

As the response left her lips the women stared at one another aghast, and then, shaking off their stupefaction, shrieked violently in consort, hurling such a hurricane of invective at her that for a while her own tones were drowned.

"I am sorry to be disrespectful," she replied, hotly, at length; "but I am not a child to respect relationship by itself: there must be something else to honour! Oh! are you all blind, deaf, stone—what are you made of? Don't you see how fearful it is? Are you pretending? Have

you no knowledge of morality—no consciences?"

"How dare you," ejaculated Sophie, "you . . . you minx, how dare you?"

"You can laugh at anecdotes like those! Is theft a joke?"

"Do you presume to lecture your elders?" shouted Emilia. "Leave the room, miss, or I'll box your ears!"

"When you do that, Aunt Emilia, I shall leave the house!"

"You will do what?"

"I shall leave the house! Let us understand each other: I came to my father—I believed it my duty, and because I believe it my duty I will stay with him while he wishes it—but I came to no one else; and it is you who presume, not I!"

The fragile girl's eyes were ablaze with

wrath and indignation, and the huge woman quailed.

"That is your daughter, Robert," she muttered.

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and had recourse to more tobacco; he had nothing to say. In fancy he was reliving a similar scene in Russell Square, when the girl's mother, then a six months' bride, had also moaned in misery, "Good Heavens! don't you know the meaning of right and wrong!" The "tragedy," for so he inwardly denominated it, was eminently distasteful to him, albeit he was the originator. He was dimly conscious that fate had treated him very shabbily in not making him the millionnaire that Sophie had prophesied he would become, a condition under which it must surely be easy enough to be good and honourable, and

to escape all distressing shocks to the nerves. He was, he decided, a victim of circumstances; but as he doubted his ability to demonstrate it satisfactorily to Violet, he held his tongue, and for twenty-four hours declined to favour her with so much as a glance. When he did manifest a remembrance that she existed, the suavity of his demeanour was assumed for the benefit of a guest. He said—

"Mr. Moses, my daughter."

The eagerly expected council below was over, and he had brought the stockbroker upstairs to be presented to Mrs. Dyas and the spinsters, who were endeavouring to look as if they sat in the drawing-room every evening. Violet was ensconced by the piano, a few yards away from the others, and as the door was opened she scanned the important visitor with curiosity

from the shelter of the "Sonata Pathétique."

The first things that struck her about him were his bulk and darkness. He was very heavy and tall, with a black moustache and coarse crisp hair that, short as it was cut, had a tendency to curl. His eyes were nearly black, too, but there were no depths to them, and he detracted from their size by an habitual frown, which lowered his strongly-marked eyebrows till they almost met in the centre and gave him an ill-tempered expression which belied his disposition. When he smoked, as he was speedily pressed to do, he always stuck the cigar between the teeth in the corner of his mouth. His hands were large, white, and badly shaped; his neck was thick. Without being particularly muscular, he carried little superfluous fat, and yet the weight

of the man impressed you more than his height. He seemed a magnificent animal, a human Colossus.

"I am pleased to meet Miss Dyas." His voice grated rather, but there was unmistakable admiration in it. "I hope I haven't been keeping this gentleman away from everybody too long?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Moses," simpered Sophie; "and—and—may we say, 'well?'"

"Ladies *are* curious, proverbially," put in Emilia, gruffly arch, "aren't they? I daresay Mr. Moses has learnt that long ago, and we're dying to hear about the business, if we may be sanguine or not."

"A nice cross-examination you want to let Moses in for!" said Robert. "Moses, take my advice, and refuse to talk shop."

"Oh, Bobbie, don't be horrid!" pleaded

Sophie. "Oh, you *are* nasty! Isn't he, Mr. Moses?"

"Mr. Moses will answer *me!*" said Mrs. Dyas, with her best *ancien régime* delivery. "Mr. Moses—seriously now—will it be all right?"

Mr. Moses hummed and hawed.

"Since you don't mind business being spoken of," he said, "we must have the concession over, as I've just been telling your son, and go through it carefully before we can do anything at all."

"There is no flaw in that," interrupted Robert.

"And then," pursued Sophie, "when the company's brought out, it will be a big success, won't it?"

"I should think so," he rejoined; "I think it should be a very fine thing, indeed. Of course, the public's beginning to fight a

trifle shy of companies latterly—been bitten a good deal—but I don't fancy there will be any difficulty with 'The Salvador,' the unusual . . . However, we mustn't count our chickens before they're hatched. I'm sure this young lady here is considering it a dreadful bore to have the City dragged into the drawing-room to stop her music; now, weren't you, Miss Dyas?"

"Oh, Violet," said Emilia, amiably, "don't sit over there, Violet; come closer. Here's a chair, dear!"

The girl smiled finely as she complied. So far from deeming it a bore, she thought since the introduction of a Company as a topic produced "company manners," it was a distinct advantage.

"Mr. Moses!" how awful the appellation sounded now she had to utter it, "that was an excuse. I was deeply interested, and I

decline to be your pretext for reserve; it isn't fair!"

"But I did interfere with the music?"

"I assure you I don't play!"

"Yet I can see what that piece is you've just put down," he insisted, boldly.

"It belongs to an aunt with whom I have been staying; I brought it away in my portfolio by accident!"

"But she can accompany herself," struck in Robert. "Violet, go and sing to us, will you?"

"Shan't I be dragging in the music to put a stop to the City?" she asked.

Mr. Moses laughed.

"Please do," he begged, his black eyes fixed upon her. "I'll find you a song, shall I?"

"Do you care for that sort of thing, Mr. Moses, really?" inquired Sophie.

"Really and desperately," he hastened to assure her, in a sentence composed of politeness, irreverence, and untruth in equal parts. "My inducement to behave myself in this world is the hope of hearing some unexceptionable choirs in the next!"

The maiden dissembled perplexity. His easy reference to a future state embarrassed her somewhat, recalling, as it did, their difference of creed. Besides, she was by no means certain that a stockbroker named Moses had any right to expect to go to Heaven at all.

Here the little servant, who had been hurried off to the grocer's to fetch some sherry, brought it in, decanted, on a salver, and Violet ran her fingers through the opening bars.

The flame of the candle shone full upon the delicate profile; the light of six burners

poured down upon the girlish wrists and head. In the poky apartment, hot with the glare of gas and ugly with gimcrack ornaments and oleographs in tarnished frames, the form at the shabby "cottage" was the one object sweet and restful to the eye. The spinsters were wondering grimly if the visitor expected supper; their mamma, who was forbidden wine, effected a compromise by slyly drinking a bumper of the spurious sherry. Robert puffed slowly at a cigarette, and abandoned himself to a reverie in which there floated in fascinating capitals before his gaze a prospectus of "The Salvador Casino Company." The girl was the primary figure all at once, but the climax had yet to be attained. Mr. Moses threw a shilling cigar in the fender and walked over to her side. He leant across the instrument, the great *parti*, until the

final chord had died away, and then, like Oliver, requested "more," banishing allusion to a scheme which was to bring him fifty thousand pounds, in order to listen to the untrained contralto of Miss Violet Dyas.

When her niece got up from that piano, Emilia reflected with amazement that it was only yesterday she had threatened to box her ears.

CHAPTER XI.

HENCEFORWARD, then, Violet was a personage. Her merits, as discerned by these people, had never lifted her above mere tolerance, but the attentions of Mr. Leopold Moses stamped her with a different value altogether, and had the gentleness and consideration she met with now been characteristics of the treatment she received previous to the revelation of her father's dishonesty, she might by this time have loved her relations very dearly. Even as it was, she felt guilty in the face of so much tenderness, though, after a while, she began

to understand its origin; she blamed herself for her denunciation, her unrepressed scorn. She said it was not her fault that she despised, but she had been culpable in having declared she did. Yet, oh! the agony, never to be lost sight of in any secondary pain occasioned by self-reproach, of knowing one's father to be a thief! A swindler, who gave all the story-books the lie, and instead of wrestling with conscience in his guilt piqued himself on his proficiency in stealing, and recounted little selections from his hideous career to his sisters as examples of shrewdness and to raise a laugh. She shivered when he touched her. Her day was a nightmare in which she moved, and ate, and drank mechanically, only to have it continued through her sleep. Night after night she dreamed of prisons and a convict who called her "daughter." Night after

night she awoke, trembling in every limb, and fell to marvelling until daylight broke what the few residents she had been used to visit in Chester would say if they were aware Miss Dyas's father was a sharper, a rogue who might be arrested and thrown into gaol for robbing a jewellery shop. Would they talk to her any more, she wondered, or in that staid cathedral town would she and Mrs. Carroll be shunned? Did Aunt Bertha know what he was? Had her mother known? O God! the dead woman; O God! her poor mother—to be his wife! To call him "husband," to be tied to him always!

Why had Providence permitted them to meet—why ordained that she should be their child, that she should suffer the torture of being compelled to loathe the man who gave her birth? Odd, disentangled speculations

floated hazily through her brain in the stillness concerning the mysteries of existence; conjectures as to her own identity if the dead woman had married another lover and borne a girl, whether the girl would have been herself amid different surroundings, or a being whom this individuality which was "Violet" resembled not at all. Weary, broken-hearted mother, she could divine the wretchedness that had been hers, and now, alas! it must be inherited and her own till . . . till what? The door of escape was open—she could return to the peace from which she had been torn! Why should she not go? What prevented her: duty? Was the child's debt uninfluenced by the parent's claim? And would it not be braver to avow her unwillingness to stop than to stay on and shrink from the touch of a

father's lips each time he chanced to kiss her.

She was tempted to write Mrs. Carroll the truth, sorely tempted, yet she delayed. Dawn would see her pale, exhausted, resolved to terminate her misery by the decisive step that morning, and already invigorated by the determination; and sunrise steal in upon her hesitating once more, questioning her right to act so, and ashamed because of the very access of cheerfulness the intention had produced.

Meanwhile, Mr. Moses's visits had continued, though the Salvador Casino Company had not as yet made any headway, and she experienced some relief by the addition of the stockbroker to the family circle. Dissimilar as was the tone of the conversation on the evenings of his

calls to that to which she had been accustomed at home, it was at least wider and less vulgar than when the family were alone. Moreover, beginning to perceive that the deference he paid her was responsible for the respect with which she was now favoured, she was also glad when he was announced on that account. A human weakness was gratified in manifesting to these elderly women who had alternately patronized and disparaged her that a man of thirty-eight whose reputation for smartness they lauded so continually in private, held her opinions more interesting than theirs, and cared to talk to her.

His deference was not honeyed, either; he often spoke to her rather brusquely—not rudely, but brusquely—as if he regarded her as an intelligent child, and when that frown of his vanished at an

observation from the corner where she was sitting, and he looked across with his loud strident laugh, she was a trifle flattered.

Her singing when he was there became a regular feature of the entertainment, he always demanded it, and on one occasion brought her a new ballad.

"That's a pretty song," he remarked, throwing it on the table; "I think you'll like it."

She glanced at it, ignorant of the importance of a first offering, and said, "Thank you," "just as if"—*vide* Sophie and Emilia—"Susan had handed her a cup of tea," and their admiration for her went up to par at a bound. "It was extr'ord'nary luck for the chit to get a catch like Moses to take notice of her at all," they commented; "but for her to have the

courage to sham indifference to lead him on was really talent. What nerve!" That it had been no attempt to lead him on whatever, never occurred to them, for even when they are rivals with a *débutante* for the same prey, and not mere spectators of the game as in this case, middle-aged women will far more readily applaud the triumphs of superior skill than acknowledge the attractions of innocence. The supremacy of art they may hope to acquire; the innocence they can never regain.

Moses himself estimated the action justly, but it stimulated his admiration, too. Maida Vale had made such a dead set at this man for years that to listen to a girl who talked poetry and books, and had ideality in her eye instead of a carriage and pair, was a novel sensation to him. It is worthy of note that more individuals

than the historical celebrity have been willing to purchase novelty at a high price.

He had never met anybody like her; partly because his tastes lay in the groove in which he had been reared, and partly because the highest class Jewish society is exclusive in the extreme, he had not penetrated the upper ranks of his co-religionists, and Christian households had been *terræ incognitæ* to him. The Misses Jacobs, Solomons, etc., with whom he had flirted, and who, encouraged by Mesdames Jacobs, Solomons, etc., had deposited their Oriental beauty at his side, and scanned his "hand" at solo whist, were the only type of possible wives he had hitherto known; and though he had always taken it for granted that he would eventually marry a Jewess, now he was cast in contact with Violet, the

Jewesses from whom he was able to select appeared coarse and loud.

Religious scruples did not weigh with him an atom, nor social ones. Maida Vale was growing used to mixed marriages. Nevertheless, he had not progressed so far as to deem it likely he would propose, it had only struck him it would be an intoxicating thing to possess this graceful girl with her exquisite face if marriage had been a state he had been desirous of entering at present, and then he had permitted himself to foresee with a thrill of fanciful elation the stir she would create sweeping into the crowded drawing-rooms in diamonds and lace among the full-blown wives of the other men. Good heavens! she would be a positive revelation. How lovely she was—and in a stuff frock! The stuff frock was another portion of

the novelty to him; the Misses Jacobs and Solomons always wore silk.

It was nearly ten days subsequent to his introduction that one afternoon he arrived without an invitation when Violet was practising, and the others, as usual, slumbered in various stages of *deshabille* below. Susan, startled and incoherent, conducted him upstairs, and scurried away to rouse Mrs. Dyas and the spinsters with the tidings of the unanticipated honour. As he was shown in, Violet looked up, surprised to see him at so early an hour.

"How do you do?" she said, advancing. "My father is out; I don't think he knew . . ."

"No," said Mr. Moses, "he didn't. I only knew I was coming myself just now. I've some news for him."

"Good news?" she inquired.

"No," he answered, "d . . very bad news!"

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks, I will. Don't run away."

"I was going to tell my grandmother you were here," she explained; "perhaps the servant imagined she was in the room."

"No," he rejoined, "she said she would 'inform the ladies, sir!' You needn't trouble. Besides, I don't want to talk business longer than I can help, and as soon as your aunts turn up I shall be catechized unmercifully."

At this moment the three women below were starting to their feet in dismay. "Mr. Moses . . . Good gracious! How's my hair? . . . Who's with him, Susan?"

"Miss Violet, ma'am."

"Oh!"

Their *toilettes* took so long that it was full twenty minutes before the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted. Mr. Moses smiled inwardly more than once.

"Do you know, Miss Dyas," he said—and she never suspected he was alluding to "artful cats," although their artfulness was welcome—"I'm glad to get a chance to talk to you; you're so quiet of an evening, aren't you?"

"Am I?" she responded; "well, yes, as a rule, perhaps. It's a peculiarity of mine to sit silent and dream when I ought to be chatting and amusing people. I must get out of it."

"Was I finding fault? I said you were quiet, I didn't say it was wrong. What do you dream about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," gaily; "puddings, and pies, and . . ."

"That's not true. Joking on one side, what *are* your dreams when you stare at nothing and don't hear a word of what's going on?"

"I'm surely not so bad as that," she demurred; "you're describing a very unpleasant character, Mr. Moses."

"Shall I tell you, . . . it's impudence rather to own it, but you always give me the idea of being out of place in this house, Miss Dyas, you do, that's flat! Other girls at home—of course, I don't know much about Christian families—but the girls I see bustle about more, and lay down the law, and . . . were you brought up here?"

"I am very comfortable, thank you," she said, coldly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I didn't mean that! What I meant was that you seem

different to what I—with all due respect to your relations—should have thought a girl brought up amongst them would have been, that's all. Of course, I can't judge much, I haven't been here often enough."

It struck him he had got on with her better when they discussed the plot of a novel in public than he did now that they were conversing alone, from which discovery a lesson might have been easily adduced. So far from adducing it, however, the rich man merely reflected what an odd situation it was for him to be making up to a girl who snubbed him.

Simultaneously she felt that she had been scarcely gracious.

"I was not brought up here, since you ask," she answered. "My father has been abroad for many years, and I've been living with an aunt in the country—the aunt the

'Sonata Pathétique' belonged to. As for being 'out of place,' though, I hope that's imagination on your part, because I have been endeavouring to become less dreamy and more practical for such a long time, and I shouldn't like to think all my efforts at reform had been in vain. Practicality is the great desideratum, isn't it?"

"Depends upon what one's notion of being practical is. It wouldn't do for a man, at any rate, to be anything else on the Stock Exchange. Do you like practical people, Miss Dyas?"

"Why, I said I was trying to imitate them, now, didn't I?"

"I believe I'd stop as I am if I were you," he observed; "you need not improve."

"You have never lived in the country, have you, Mr. Moses?" *à propos des bottes.*

"No. I run down to Brighton very often, but that's hardly the country, is it?"

"I haven't understood it to be rural, but I've never been there."

"Haven't you?" he exclaimed. "Oh, you should go; it's awfully jolly, and so near town, too. But why did you want to know?"

"I was only going to say what a change London is to anybody who is used to the stillness—the omnibuses, and the cabs, and the incessant clatter of footsteps. I suppose Londoners' ears get accustomed to it, but to me it never seems quite quiet here; even when you can't classify a noise you can feel it. There is a kind of vague roar in the air."

"It's still enough in this street, isn't it? A graveyard couldn't be much quieter than this!"

"It is a dreadful street," she dissented, "you can't form an opinion. Next door somebody begins Mendelssohn's 'Spring' at eight every morning, . . . now you know how Mendelssohn's 'Spring' should go?"

"Why, of course," he replied.

He did not know Mendelssohn's "Spring" from the "See-Saw Valse."

"Light as the breeze," she continued.

"Certainly," he said, "as light as anything."

"Well, this fiend grinds it. The village blacksmith's brawny arm hammering horseshoes is fairy-like in comparison to that touch next door, and it goes on till twelve, and begins again at five. Then there is an aspiring genius across the way who tortures a fiddle; and 'Number Fifteen' has two

little boys in sailor suits, and why those little boys don't play in the square itself I don't know, but they run races on the pavement, and make the lamp-post at the bottom of our steps their goal. If they would make it their starting-point it wouldn't matter so much, because at the starting-point they are holding their breath, but at the goal they shriek. Virginia Square is really and truly a dreadful street. I think Russell Square, and all those, are the nicest I've seen!"

"My sister lives near there," he said, "Mrs. Rosenstein, she lives in Montague Square."

"And do you?" she asked, more for the sake of saying something than because she cared.

"I? No, she lives with her husband, not with me; I've got rooms. I hate the

West Central district! Oh, here come your aunts!"

The spinsters now hurried in with profuse apologies for their delay, and regretting that Robert was out.

"He is lunching with Mr. Iglesias, but he won't be long!" they declared in a duet, in which Emilia's bass preponderated. "You will wait, Mr. Moses, won't you, he would be so sorry if he missed you?"

"So sorry," repeated Sophie in the treble, "we expect him back every minute!"

They devoted themselves to attempting to extort the newest item of intelligence anent the Company, and Violet after witnessing the stockbroker's polite evasions took advantage of their presence to slip away to pay her diurnal visit to old Mr. Dyas. She knew how quick he was to feel himself

slighted by her, and she was very late already.

The old man, as usual, was smoking a long clay in a wooden arm-chair, for the amelioration of which she had presented him with her rejuvenated pillow. It was a very large chair, and he was a very small man, so he sat huddled to one side of it, his frock-coat bulging violently, and forcibly reminded the girl—she really could not help it—of a "Guy Fawkes" late in the evening, after it had been out all day. His den had been furnished by instalments, each article therein having reached its final stage of dilapidation in some other room before it had been removed to this one. The walls, however, he had been permitted to embellish according to the dictates of his own taste, and his gallery of art intensified the extraordinary appearance of an

apartment that contained a table of marble, short of a gilded leg, two deal stools from the scullery, a scarcely-disguised washhand-stand, and a pair of green satin curtains which had been banished in ribbons from the drawing-room five years before. He had collected theatrical posters, and portraits from the illustrated papers, discarded pipes remarkable for nothing but their foulness, landscapes cut from the covers of shilling chocolate boxes, and women's heads, grave and coquettish, advertising the excellence of tobaccos, soaps, tooth-powders, and beef-tea; while so indefatigable had been his labours, and so vast was the accumulation, that his only difficulty to-day, when a box of sweetmeats was brought into the house, was to find a spare inch where the appropriated lid could be stuck up.

In pursuit of these lids he was, never-

theless, as relentless as an Indian on the track of a foe, running them to earth in a work-basket or a drawer, and biding an opportunity for a successful raid sometimes for weeks. He had discovered one this morning, and by a *coup de main* sidled it into his pocket at once, his face kept fronting the assembly, and wearing an expression of child-like innocence that disarmed suspicion. He had been intending to display it triumphantly to Violet, but the tardiness of her arrival had aggravated him, and now she did come his manner was dignified. Still it was lying beside him, and his eyes twinkled as he saw that she observed it.

"A new picture, grandfather!" she cried. "Where did you get it?"

"Which?" he said with affected surprise. "This? Oh, it's only a little thing, quite a little thing, this one!"

"*With* sheep," she commented; "rustic and sweet!"

"It has gone six," he said, huffily, "hasn't it?"

"Yes, it has," she answered. "Mr. Moses is here, and I couldn't get down before."

"Anything fresh?" he asked, mollified by an excuse. "What are they all talking about; I suppose they're as sweet as sugar now that fellow's here?"

"Mr. Moses has some news, but he wants to tell it to my father himself, and until he comes home nobody will know what it is."

"Ho!" he snapped, "he isn't home yet, isn't he; stuffing the fat o' the land, I'll be bound! That Company will never come off, you see, Violet! Wish it would; it'd be a fine thing if he'd go! I don't like him here, he treats me as if I were dirt!"

"If my father went away he would take me with him," she suggested, "and then you would have no afternoon visitor, remember!"

"He has the best of everything, and I get the worst!"

"You deceive yourself a trifle, don't you? and I am sure he doesn't mean to be rude to you."

"Always rude to me! Yesterday he sneered at me because I chumped my food, I saw him. If he'd got no teeth, and were given lumps that were all vein and gristle, p'raps he'd chump! Oh, he's a swell, your father is, but he doesn't make a living, and never will."

"Tell me about the picture, grandfather," she said; "how did you come across it?"

He drifted easily into an account of his acquisition, babbling with feeble delight of

the way he had espied it, and of his daring in annexing it under the very noses of his wife and daughters.

These moments were the least wretched travesties of conversation that she knew, for at least she was not called upon to simulate liveliness with her grandfather, and after he was fairly started, like a clockwork train, he clattered along, regardless whether he was amusing or not.

Presently Susan brought him some tea and a couple of slices of bread and butter. She said there was to be no regular meal that evening, but that cups of tea and a cake were to be taken upstairs, and would Miss Violet please to join the others.

"*I* get no cake," complained the little old man, "bread and butter's good enough for *me!*"

"When I go up, I'll send you a piece

down," declared the girl. "Hark! there's my father coming in."

They heard him passing through the hall, and mounting to the drawing-room, and then a shout of welcome from the spinsters, audible to Violet, informed her that he had opened the door.

"I shan't go up now," she said, "not just yet; I should be in the way of the business discussion. Do you mind waiting for that cake?"

He shook his head.

No, he would wait for the cake, although he evidently opined waiting was synonymous with going without it, and that his son would eat it all. He was extremely anxious, though, to know what had caused Moses to look in thus early, and first begged Violet to go and ascertain, and then requested her to stop

where she was, that they might be curious together.

"They ain't laughing, are they?" he inquired; "they ain't laughing any longer? I wonder what it is, don't you? What can it be?"

He invented the most startling explanations for half an hour or so, and at last Violet, who wanted some tea herself, determined to join the others as she had been desired.

As she rose with the intention, they flocked out upon the landing, wishing the guest good-bye.

"Where did you vanish to, Miss Dyas?" he exclaimed, descending as she went up. He looked somewhat bored, and under the stereotyped smiles of her relations she could plainly discern disappointment.

"I was just coming back," she said, pausing with her hand on the banisters. "I didn't know you were leaving."

"Can't you stop, Mr. Moses?" put in her grandmother. "Stop, and spend the evening with us."

"Thanks, I'm afraid I cannot," he replied, hastily. "I've an appointment for eight that I must keep; but if another night, without——"

"Oh, Mr. Moses, we shall always be delighted!" chorussed the family. "Don't stand on ceremony."

He bade them *au revoir*, and Violet followed them into the dining-room, where the chagrin she had perceived beneath the varnish of complacence was passionately displayed. Her father, after taking the whiskey bottle out of the sideboard and swallowing a third of a tumblerful neat,

flung himself on the sofa and declined to utter a word. Her aunts broke instantly into the most violent lamentations, and from these she was enabled to gather an idea of the misfortune that had occurred.

It seemed, that having gone through the documents purporting to contain the valuable concession, Mr. Moses' solicitors had apprized him that the powers accorded were not nearly so wide as had been represented; more particularly, the concession sanctioned neither *Roulette* nor *Trente et Quarante*, merely permitting—ironically, and almost as insult to injury, it was felt — the innocuous pastime of *Petits Chevaux*. It was the death-blow to Robert's hopes. The vision of thousands had melted into air, and "The Salvador Casino Company, Limited," would never attain the dignity of a prospectus.

To rail at fate, and vehemently vituperate the absent Iglesias, his brother, and his nation, were at best but poor resources; and when Sophie and Emilia had exhausted them, the gloom that fell upon the household was as heavy as a London fog. The brief but wild torrent of abuse had left the spinsters physical wrecks; the tenor of Mrs. Dyas's fitful remarks was to the effect that she had "always said so," which was not enlivening; and the intelligence of the catastrophe, borne in upon his solitude by his granddaughter, and implying that his son was now undoubtedly to be regarded as a fixture, caused the patriarch to writhe inside his capacious coat in a manner appalling to behold.

With the exception of the baffled Crœsus, from whom it was impossible to extract the tersest of sentences, everybody

retired at half-past nine, filing out and dispersing in depression, and Violet again reproaching herself for her desire to quit them—forsaking them now that they were in trouble appeared more than ever cowardly and mean. She lay awake and debated in what appropriate phrase, free from the suspicion of gush even here, she could have bade her father cheer up. She wished she had attempted some consolation. Heaven knew the bond between them was strained enough, but she might have done something; a clasp of the hand, a passing touch, would have signified compassion, and freed her from the charge of coldness. His sisters, his mother, had refrained from any demonstration of sympathy, it was true, unless calling other people names was an equivalent; but then they and he were fond of one another,

while she was estranged from him. By her own voice she had reared the barrier — if she could have blotted out the memory of her condemnation that day! if she could have recalled that quarrel and her avowal of contempt! Was the remembrance of it intensifying his pain to-night? she questioned. Was he feeling bitterly that, though his past had pages he had been a better man without, the sequel of his child's disgust was a punishment God in His mercy might have withheld? And yet — and yet — if she had *not* despised the treacherous and dishonest, she would have been as wicked as he, and could a merciful God be asked to curse the innocent in order to spare the sinful?

The room was dark; only a spot of blue indicated the position of the gas-

burner, and in the stillness she listened for the sound that would tell her he had roused himself from his despair sufficiently to seek his bed. The tramp of a hurrying pedestrian from time to time rang out along the pavements, but no footfall stirred within. Once or twice a brougham rolled past, and the lamp-rays filtered through the Venetian blinds floated in pale bars of light across the ceiling, and then sank engulfed in the obscurity of the opposite wall. Every nerve quickened by penitence and pity, she strained her ears to catch the longed-for tread, and at last unable to remain quiescent any longer, partially dressed herself and peered anxiously over the banisters into the hall below.

There the gas was still flaring, and the thought of the despondent man prostrated by a grief his daughter might

alleviate, strengthened her new resolve. Undecided what she would say, yet determined to comfort him at any hazard, she crept softly down the narrow stairs, her heart beating more tumultuously at every step, and with each movement dreading her descent would disturb the sleepers, who might detract from her courage by their remonstrances or surprise.

When she reached the door she hesitated; doubt, sensitiveness, the fear that such an undertaking as this savoured in Virginia Square of the theatrical momentarily damped her ardour, and half-impelled her to steal back. Next, banishing the temptation, she sought some introductory speech, some preliminary excuse for the intrusion. In her excitement none suggested itself. She termed herself a coward, and, impulsively turning the handle, looked in.

Her father was sitting at the table, his head bowed upon his breast. He did not observe her entry, but, undeterred by his abstraction, and perhaps emboldened by it, she went across to him and laid her arms gently about his shoulders.

"Father," she said, "you must be very tired, you——"

The poor words faded on her lips. He had lifted his haggard features with an incoherent mutter, staring at her stupidly out of glassy eyes. Under her nostrils rose a hot and evil odour, and the whiskey-bottle—which had held his water of Lethe—lay empty between the legs of the chair.

The shock, the disillusion, shattered her utterly, and for remonstrance she only covered her face with her fingers, and burst into a storm of hysterical sobs. He,

partly sobered by the outbreak, staggered to his feet, but too drunk to advance, clutched wildly at the table-cover, and there swaying heavily to and fro, contemplated her with vacant consternation.

"Violet," he stammered, "what do you want? what's . . . what's the matter, my dear?"

"Let me help you upstairs," she said, the tears running down her cheeks, "let me help you, will you?"

"What's the matter?" he reiterated. "What's it all about?"

Dumbly, and with her gaze bent upon the carpet in shame, she guided the helpless figure along, even managing to steer him so far as the passage. As they got into it, however, the gas suddenly went out, and, simultaneously, her father reeled from

her support, and grasping at the air, fell in a heap upon the ground.

For a second she was stunned, her agony itself was lost sight of in her fright; the tumble, the unaccountable darkness into which they were so swiftly plunged, stupefied her, and it was not until she heard someone moving in the basement that she comprehended that the light had been extinguished at the meter, and one of the servants was preparing to go to rest, imagining herself the latest up.

The drunkard made no effort to regain his footing. Longing to scream for aid, and yet loath to expose his degradation, she leant over him, loosening his collar with her shaking hands, and beseeching him in piteous whispers to strive to understand. Blackness thick and impenetrable enveloped the tipsy man and the trembling

girl, the gurgles of intoxication alone answered her quavering appeals, and now, leavening the obscurity, the glimmer of a candle proclaimed the servant's approach.

To screen him from view was to be attained by but one means. Stooping still lower, she wound her arms around his neck, and struggled to drag him back into the shelter of the room until the woman had passed.

Some slight progress she accomplished, although her limbs ached desperately, and the smell of spirits issuing from the mouth that lolled back upon her bosom in this enforced embrace sickened and revolted her. But the hideous satire upon the caresses she had dreamed of was short lived. The burden was too great for her strength; her body quivered under the

load, and with a stifled moan of exhaustion, her hold relaxed.

At the same instant the knocker rose and fell in a double crash which in her overwrought condition seemed to shake the house to its foundation.

Scarcely more steadily than her father himself had walked, she tottered forward, and took in a telegram from the boy upon the steps.

When she turned, Susan was already a dismayed spectator of the scene she would have hidden from her.

"Oh, Heaven save us!" exclaimed the woman, "what's happened? Let's get him up to bed. Pray, let's get him up to bed, miss."

They went down on their knees together, one each side of the unconscious form, and, kneeling on the oilcloth, the

flame of the guttering tallow showed Violet the superscription of the missive she had received. It was addressed to herself.

Marvelling what tidings could affect her powerfully at a crisis like the present, she tore it open.

Mrs. Carroll was at the point of death.

CHAPTER XII.

That night Violet never forgot: it was imprinted on her memory through life. The awakening of the spinsters, the hasty explanation that she must start for Chester at once, the arrangement that Susan should accompany her—these things were dimly remembered, or, rather, the recollection of the details was blurred; but the night itself was for ever distinct in her mind, conspicuous amidst years for the twofold blow it had dealt at her duty and her love.

Only when she was rattling out into the

broader thoroughfares did it strike her she knew nothing of the departing trains, and so the cab was brought to a standstill at the entrance to a public-house, and the servant sent in to request a glimpse of an "A B C." It was discovered that from Euston, whither she had chokingly directed the man in the first instance, with a reminiscence of her arrival, a train left for Chester at midnight, and they were therefore in time; yet, in her anxiety, each road they sped through appeared interminable, and it was not until the tickets were fairly taken and she was pacing the platform by Susan's side that the dread of being too late to travel forsook her.

Here, as during the drive, the throng, the lights, the perpetual exhibition of wakefulness and bustle met her gaze strangely. The hour or more in bed previous to her

return *en deshabille* to the dining-room, then the hasty *toilette* and exit into the streets where the people had not been to bed to-night at all, bewildered her with a feeling of resuscitation, and harassed her apart from the shocks she had experienced altogether. The catastrophes themselves were repeated panorama-wise in a procession of endless and awful pictures, so persistent and so vivid that afterwards she often wondered how any of the minutiæ could have escaped her. Leering grotesquely through the announcements on the hoardings before she took her seat, she saw her father lurching towards her. To the clatter of the engine, when they were at last rushing through the open country, again and again she mentally enacted the evening's events, from her vigil on the landing to that double knock which had preluded the deadly news.

By the feeble rays of the lamp overhead she re-read the message—

"Your aunt dangerously ill; come immediately; doctors despondent.—FINLASON."

—and cried to the great God to spare her. Then a new terror sprang into existence—she might be too late still; the train itself might be too late; even now the soul might be passing away!

Above the silent landscape as they flew by it a watery moon peered through the trailing clouds, and shivering in her corner of the compartment, opposite the servant, who slept heavily, the girl accepted as an omen the vagaries of this sky that, dividing heaven and earth, separated with its vapoury barrier the two worlds between which was hovering irresolute the spirit that she loved.

As though traversing in the celestial sphere a course parallel with the journey

below, the moon now shook from her amber face the last vestige of the obscuring gloom and sailed divinely ahead of the tearing train, piloting and sustaining, it almost seemed, and illumining with her beams the earthly track of steam and rails. Anon huge masses of dun-coloured cloud veiled her smile once more. Blackness descended over the woodland, wrapping trees and hill-tops in its vast embrace, and a soaking rain fell miserably amid the indistinguishable forms, pattering on the roofs of the carriages, and swirling in wind-driven gusts against the heavy glass. Shrieking, panting, the iron giant dashed on through the sleeping towns, and Violet, wearily calculating the time that must elapse ere her suspense could be allayed, suffered imagination to run riot among a host of possibilities as distracting as the certainty of the worst:

Bertha dying before she could reach her; the countenance emaciated by disease; the disordered coverlet under which she writhed and listened. Such sights now banished the experiences, varied only by the exaggerated features of a drunken man, which appeared to protrude themselves forcibly between the crowd of suppositions, till they actually confronted her a reality amongst the dreams, while the brain, stimulated by the forced inactivity of the body, preternaturally quickened the senses, and extracted from the cushions that surrounded her the faint atmosphere of the sick-room itself.

Presently, cold streaks of grey were visible upon the darkness; spire and hedge-row loomed vaguely upon her eyes; fences took shape, and the shades of night melted into mist. Flooding the heavens the sun swam upward over the meadows; a puff

of blue curled cheerfully from a cottage chimney. There, as they described that sudden curve, she saw a villager trudging across a field to his daily work, and nature, invigorated by the shower, glistened freshly through the moisture like the limbs of some chubby urchin splashing from the captivity of his tub.

It was morning, warm and brilliant, when the hoarse bawl of "Chester! . . . Chester!" broke at length upon her ears, and she was led by the stolid housemaid, whose demeanour after her sleep betrayed neither fatigue nor uneasiness, to a fly upon the rank.

Quaking and sick, she leant forward in the stuffy vehicle and looked out upon the well-remembered course. The canal-bridge, the theatre, the baker's shop where Bertha dealt, each landmark was welcomed with increasing nervousness. The shop had a

new name painted across it, and she wondered simultaneously why the old tenants had left, and how it could be possible for her to wonder about it at such a time.

They were nearing their destination; with a jolt they rounded the familiar corner, and the wheels turned softly upon straw. The sight of this straw was like a physical blow. Projecting her head through the window, she could perceive the portico of Powis Lodge; a moment later and the front of the house was in view. The blinds were lowered. She staggered up the steps, and Aggie opened the door. There was no need for the woman to say it, yet she did.

"It's all over, Miss Violet . . . she's gone!"

The girl fell into her arms, and they clung sobbing and crying together.

Death had resulted from inflammation of

the lungs. The illness had been so trifling at first, that it was thought nothing of: a chill taken in leaving the cathedral on a wet Sunday evening, a passing indisposition; then the summons of a doctor, and a more serious aspect of the case; and now it was "over,"—voice, feeling, comprehension vanished, only the body remaining—the body which had been Her and was already "it," the body with which these things had seemed connatural, and which to-day, after their flight, was left with motionless, insentient lips, a satire on the flesh that had been kissed.

The lawyer was Violet's support during her stay. He came regularly, and took her round to his home as frequently as he could persuade her to go, but she found the presence of his son there distasteful under the circumstances, and generally declined

his entreaties, kindly as they were meant.

Wreaths came, and strange men with heavy footsteps, and all the paraphernalia of woe; and after the funeral she went back to Virginia Square where no mourning garments had been purchased, and no pretence was made of grieving for the connection the family had never visited. This, natural or not, estranged them from the girl yet more. That "She," who had been so much to her, was avowedly nothing to them, reminded her how little they had in common. The gentleness of the spinsters' tones when they addressed her was powerless to atone for the colours of their gowns; the occasional suspicion of apology and deprecation in her father's manner touched her not—a hatband would have moved her to tears.

About two months later, Mr. Moses, who,

availing himself of the general invitation, had developed from a casual caller into *l'ami de la maison*, met her in the streets. She had been to a florist's in Norfolk Terrace to order a box of flowers for the Chester grave, and at sight of her he stopped his hansom and strolled to the house by her side, talking of her loss and his sympathy till—a girl's trouble and a man's compassion forming a dangerous topic—just as they entered the Ledbury Road, he drifted into a proposal.

He was, perhaps, more surprised than she when the question was put. He had known he wanted her, but scarcely that he would tell her so just yet. Having said it, however, he, of course, spoke quite as if the offer had been designed, dwelling upon his doubt whether she would deem it bad taste so speedily after her aunt's demise

and on his impatience to know his chance.

"I'm awfully fond of you, Miss Dyas, I am, awfully! I went back sweet on you that first night! I only come to this place to see you—you understood that? I never cared for a girl as I do for you, and I can give my wife whatever she wants, you know. You shall have a carriage, and . . . and any amount of diamonds if you'll accept me. I'm making three thousand a year, and . . . what do you say, Violet, you don't dislike me, do you?"

For a moment, though no spark of love for the man was in her heart, the thought of the release his offer held caused her to hesitate; but it was only for a moment.

"I don't dislike you, Mr. Moses," she said, "but I can't be your wife. I don't love you, either!"

"That would come," he answered readily. "As long as you don't dislike me, where's the difficulty? I didn't imagine you were a prey to a devouring passion? I'm sure your father would be glad!"

"Oh! my father," she echoed; "yes, I daresay!"

"Look here, frankly, Violet: I'm not romantic. I know you could satisfy me, and you're not over and above happy at home, I'll swear! What do you want? Almost any girl I asked would say 'Yes;' you shall have as much money as you can spend, and do just as you please. Religion isn't an obstacle, is it? you can keep your own opinions, my dear; I won't quarrel with them. Do have me, there's a darling!"

A recollection of Allan flashed across her, a remembrance of his interminable petitions, his passionate arguments in favour

of mixed marriages. How differently men told their love! And was a poor man always more fervid than a rich one, she wondered?

"Do have me, darling!" he repeated.

His rasping voice grew tenderer as her silence continued. He reflected that if her reluctance had been assumed, she would hardly have said she did not love him; and yet, could it be possible she meant to reject him—him who might have married the daughter of "Midas" Israel last year if he had chosen.

"Mr. Moses, I shall always be proud to recall our conversation of to-day. I shall always feel you have paid me a high compliment, but I can't marry you, indeed, indeed, I can't! I should be doing you a wrong; it is a wicked wrong for a woman to marry a man she doesn't love!"

"But——"

"But nothing!" she interrupted with a faint smile; "you will soon forget me, you must meet so many girls that you'll soon see one prettier or nicer. Shake hands to prove there's no ill feeling—will you, in the Ledbury Road?"

"Will I? Yes, in forty Ledbury Roads!" he rejoined, lightly. "All the same, you are sending me away wretched, and you could have made me very happy . . . Er . . . how long do you reckon I shall have to wait before you change your mind?"

"I shall not change my mind at all on this point, Mr. Moses. Believe me, because I mean it!"

"You may," he insisted. "I hope you will, anyhow. By-the-by, I shan't be annoying you by visiting your relations still?"

"No," she said, doubtfully.

"You don't seem very sure about it."

"May I speak quite plainly?" she asked.

"I shall feel flattered if you will!"

"Well, I don't want to give you any encouragement! I shouldn't like you to leave off calling there because I can't be your wife, but I don't want you to keep coming in the hope that I shall; do you see?"

"All right," he said, "I see, and I'll never think about the matter again—is that good enough? I'll be as platonic as your grandmother, and always talk to you about the weather or subjects just as harmless. Bargain?"

She nodded. "Yes, it's a bargain!" she said.

"Shake hands on it!"

"We can't be shaking hands all day long!" she objected.

"I should say it would be very jolly," he declared.

"You are breaking the rule already!"

"Oh, by Jove, so I am," he exclaimed, and they both laughed.

It was astonishing how intimate they were becoming all at once. She had never liked this black-browed man of thirty-eight so much or felt half so easy in his company as she did now that she had rejected him and he had accepted his fate with so little ado.

When they neared the cab-stand in the Cornwall Road: "Shall I leave you here and take another hansom on to Virginia Square?" he demanded.

"What for?" she said, looking at him in some surprise.

"Well, it will save you the cross-examination you'll get presently, if we arrive on the doorstep together."

"Oh, don't let us have any deceit," she answered; "we have a perfect right to arrive at the same time if we please."

All the same, she admired the tact that had inspired the suggestion, as women always do admire tact in the sex which so seldom shows any, estimating it more highly yet because he did not argue the point. It was considerate of him to have had such an idea, and nicer of him still to refrain from demonstrating that she was wrong to decline it. As a natural consequence, she thought, "He is very good to me:" he had intended she should.

What he thought was: "How rum and disinterested of her to be so uninfluenced by my position. I wouldn't have credited such unworldliness if I had been told about it: she is a girl in a thousand, that's certain, one to give herself through the

affections, quite regardless of the charms of a banking account, after the fashion of a heroine of a novel. Great Scot! Her style of conversation, too. I can see she is sincere! Some fellows might term the whole thing a 'move,' but not I. *I* can comprehend innocence when I encounter it." He was quite pleased with himself to find he could—"comprehend" and appreciate it too! The newly-discovered power of the finer appreciation he possessed almost compensated for the sting of the refusal.

He was a great deal more "in love" than ever, when he took his departure that evening. He had proposed on impulse, and it was only yesterday he had debated while he shaved, if he would not drop the acquaintance of "these Christians" altogether, before his infatuation became

unconquerable and he threw himself away; her reply had developed his desire amazingly, for few men are so philosophical as the fox in the fable, and if the grapes are out of reach, so far from pronouncing them sour, the unattainable fruit becomes immediately the sweetest and most succulent dainty in the garden of earth. He was hungry and thirsty for the girl. He let his mind run on her in the small hours at a friendly party where they had "a little game of Bluff," and was a perfect harvest to *Mesdames* Solomons *et Cie*, while he chewed the end of his cigar and scowled at his five cards, scarcely knowing sometimes what he held. There was a fire in his veins which Bluff was impotent to assuage. His black eyes burned fiercely, and the thick neck grew redder and redder inside his highly-glazed collar. Once he

set his teeth so convulsively that they almost met through the tobacco; Rebecca Raphael had just called his "ace high flush" with a "full hand," and she related the incident next night at Mrs. Levy's At home. "He was in such a rage, my dear, that, if you'll believe me, he nearly bit his cigar through," she said; "it made me ashamed to take his money!" And to this day the worthy lady does not suspect her "full," her ruby velvet, and her off-coloured earrings were no less than three miles and a half distant from the scene of his thoughts, and that at the moment it had seemed to Leopold Moses in his madness that money and Bluff, and all the women in Europe, were as dust and ashes to his taste, compared to the winning of one slim girl, sleeping the sleep of the pure in Bayswater.

Meanwhile the catechism he had foreseen she would be subjected to had come to pass. She had been screamed at in derision; she had been told her notions were "r'dic'lous" and high-flown. The vulgar meanness of her women folk had never been displayed so fully as now, that a connection like the stockbroker was in danger of being lost to them through the "fantastic folly" of a child who prated about the need of love, with what Sophie denominated tartly, "the sentimentality of a bread-and-butter idiot and the obstinacy of a mule!" Her father did not take part in the discussion; he had long ago decided what would be best for the paternal interests, reckoned out, while Moses had hung over the piano during her song, on the occasion of his first visit, that he would be worth more to him as a son-in-law than the

control of the girl's income if she remained single, but he thought his mother and sisters would be quite sufficient to convince her that girlhood's mission in life was to secure as eligible a husband as practicable without his being compelled to interfere. He had shown himself in his worst colours to his daughter already, which troubled him a little, since he liked to be deemed charming, and, if the matter could be effected without his remonstrances, why, he had no intention of making himself unpleasant. Indeed, should she happen to appeal to him privately for his opinion, which with the three women all against her, she might do, he considered he would even be safe in saying she was quite right; he would incite his sisters to be doubly venomous afterwards, in order to counteract the influence of his encouragement, and then her last remembrance of

him when she married would be a nice one —a desideratum by no means to be despised in a daughter who would have the spending of some thousands a year, and entertain people whom it would be so very advantageous to him to know. He assuredly did not look his age, and had always been very lucky with the other sex: who could say, with an introduction to the right groove, but what he might make a fine match himself! He was very fond of talking about the "right groove," though he had never taken the trouble to keep to the right path.

So, when after being upbraided and abused by her grandmother and her aunts, Violet was about to retire, her "good-night" unanswered by them, her father moved sympathetically forward, and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"Good-night," he replied; and then

with an air of confidential commiseration: "Don't you worry yourself, my child; they're in a bad temper, that's all, they'll talk differently to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XIII.

But on the morrow the difference was not marked, nor on the day following, nor on the day after that. In fact, the girl often asked herself during the succeeding weeks, what benefit her relations had expected to derive from the marriage, that they should be so bitterly incensed against her because it was not going to happen. The resentment in their manner and the tones of their voices when they addressed her, conveyed the impression that they were suffering some cruel wrong at her hands; each of the three women bore herself as if it were she

who was the passionately beloved of Moses, and Violet was standing in the light of her happiness forbidding the engagement.

Robert pursued the plan he had laid down for himself, and shone so brilliantly by comparison, that one morning the contingency he had considered came to pass, and she referred, a little indignantly, to the treatment she was experiencing.

"I suppose I have a perfect right to refuse the man if I please," she said; "and I should be very glad if you would make my grandmother and my aunts understand as much!"

Her father made wrinkles in his forehead.

"Women," he replied, "after they turn forty only regard marriage as an investment: it becomes simply a stroke of business to them, and the more the fellow's got the better the business is. That a girl requires

a higher incentive than a big income to give her life to a man they cannot comprehend."

"They may have whatever ideas they choose," she complained, "I have no wish to convert them; only they might allow me to keep mine. They are not even civil to me!"

"It will blow over," he assured her; "and if you *should* become 'Mrs. Moses,' you need not care whether they are civil or not—but they would be, very civil!"

"I never shall become 'Mrs. Moses'!"

"All right," he smiled, "then you won't; and it certainly isn't a pretty name, though you're too sensible to count that an objection!"

"His name mayn't be, but I'm not sure his creed isn't," she said. "I am not narrow-minded, I hope, but I always have

thought I should prefer to marry in my own religion, unless of course——"

"'Unless of course' you were in love!"

"Yes, unless I loved. And the way the difference has been ignored is a shame, not one of them has even admitted it to be an impediment worth discussing. I believe if he had been a Fire-worshipper with plenty of money, they would have viewed my acceptance as a matter of course too!"

"The Jews are everywhere to-day," he answered, "and we and they are intermarrying more every year. You can easily meet one and get quite thick with him without suspecting him to be a Jew at all."

"Yes," she said, musingly.

"You are wrong to treat Moses as you do; you hardly speak to him when he comes now, and that riles them. Talk to him the same as formerly, rather risk

flirting with him than being too standoffish. If they fancy there is still a chance of the match taking place they will behave nicely to you again."

"I won't lose one jot of my dignity to buy anybody's favour," she said; "originally, I did mean to chat with him as usual."

"I envy you that pride," he exclaimed. "That is just how I should have replied once! Yet the advice is good, it is, indeed. Ah, Violet, a man of the world feels so poor a creature beside a girl like you. I wish"—regret artistically conflicting with the determination to be cheerful—"I wish we had been always together, my dear; I should have had a cleaner record, I should have fewer failings if a pure influence like yours . . ."

"Father!" she said, pityingly.

He stroked her hair.

"What's past is past," he said, with a sigh. "Let's keep to the subject." The conclusion verged on abruptness, but he had no taste for scenes with his own daughter.

He really did it very well, and having broached the matter to him and heard his opinions on it, she began to derive a certain amount of comfort from his presence in the house. When, for instance, she was accorded a tart monosyllable from Mrs. Dyas or one of the sisters in response to some remark she had brought herself to utter in an attempt to banish the restraint, she felt he was sympathizing with her confusion, and instinctively came to glance across at him as the snub fell. Also, though she knew him to be a thief, and could not help considering him a coward

for declining to champion her, even an amiable coward and repentant thief may be less obnoxious than three sulky or virulent women. Again, and not least, we can be charitable to many faults in one who possesses the redeeming virtue of agreeing with us.

On the other hand, his family were not surprised at Robert holding himself aloof from their demonstrations of disapproval. They had thought it probable he would fly into a passion when the girl coolly confessed to throwing such a chance away, but having restrained himself then, it would have been quite unlike him to be anything but professedly pleasant afterwards. That the "poor boy" was bitterly disappointed in his child the spinsters were aware, for he had acknowledged as much more than once, and they knew if she and

Leopold Moses married how glad he would be; but down in their hearts they were conscious, too, their brother had never been conspicuous for his moral courage, so that "if the idiot is to learn the enormity of her mistake from anybody," Sophie said, with more acrimony than grammar, "it must be from mother, you, and I."

And he encouraged them to teach it well.

His conversation with Violet was repeated, garnished by the chronicler. He spurred them on by putting such criticisms into her mouth as made the spinsters' fingers itch with ire. Their appearance, their little tricks of manner were touched upon; he said the simpleton had sneered at this peculiarity or scoffed at that, till in their rage they turned positively green. Then, "Of course," he added, "she was

excited, and allowance must be made. The only thing that did exasperate me was when she said you were both too old . . . no, I am wrong; both 'past the age,' that was it, to remember what love was, and so you expected her to sell herself. Still, the girl is silly, and I dare say she is sorry now. It is mother who ought to take this affair in hand," turning to Mrs. Dyas, "not I. What voice have I got, a father in such a position as mine? It is your house she is living in, it is your authority she is under, and it is you she is defying. Believe *me*, if I were differently circumstanced she would be engaged to-morrow."

"All the same," cried Sophie, "you *are* her father, and at the worst you will have to interfere as much as anybody else."

"We haven't come to 'the worst,'" he retorted, with a shrug, "and, take it from

me, nobody will be able to do anything; her will is stronger than all yours put together."

It was his anxiety at this period that the others might force him to destroy the amicable relations, partly restored, by some piece of paternal coercion which, while it might be effectual in obtaining her submission, would leave a bitter memory in Violet's mind, and render it difficult for him to get on affectionate terms with her again. He would certainly continue his present tactics as long as he could, he decided; it could simply be a question of skill, and if he were successful in keeping the anger against her in a blaze, he might ride triumphantly over the disillusions he had occasioned earlier, and when the wedding set her free, be actually the only one in the place she did not hate. And

if there should be nothing for it but to be harsh after all, well, then his situation must be his excuse later; he would have to declare he had been bound to side with his mother since he had been a pensioner on her goodwill.

So he commenced to sit in uncomfortable chairs, and to cultivate an oppressed demeanour, which puzzled Sophie and Emilia considerably, striving by various looks and hints to inspire Violet with the notion that he was only being tolerated here now, as a preparation for the plea should it be subsequently needed.

And, meanwhile, she herself was suffering a martyrdom. His efforts had developed the taciturnity of the women folk into active warfare, and, as they were not ladies though they wore silk dresses on Sunday, this warfare resembled that

waged against the parlourmaid when she quarrels with the cook. Particularly she grew to dread the meal hours, since the table furnished a host of opportunities for slights and coarse impertinence. She would be served with uneatable portions, or else so sparingly that she rose hungry rather than accord an opening for astonished stares and whispered comments by requesting more. The servants took up the cue, and either feigned to forget her instructions or carelessly avowed they were too busy to attend to her. Once, when she retired to rest, she found the bed unmade and the sheets strewing the floor, and, her blood tingling at the littleness of such hostility, went so far as to vow in the disordered room that if she ever did marry the man, she would cut these people in the streets.

Nothing was too small for them; they could think of towels, and bade Susan search for some old ones which had been thrown aside in holes to replace those hitherto allotted to "Miss Violet." Whenever she came amongst them they immediately ceased talking, and kept eyeing her impatiently until she got up and wandered away. Her grandfather was so favoured and flattered to mark the contrast that he walked with quite an important gait, and no longer much cared whether she visited him in the afternoons or not. The advent of her admirer alone brought her respite from the persecution, for then, hollow as the attention was, she did receive a semblance of deference, and was at least better off than at any other time. Yet, setting her teeth with the determination to act indifference to the last, she endured

it coldly until well into the autumn, and might ultimately have worn the women out by dint of the simulated patience, but for a culminating outbreak of malice too great for her hardihood—an outbreak which scattered her powers of self-restraint to all the winds of heaven.

Ever since her arrival she had kept the portrait of Bertha Carroll hanging on the wall of her apartment, and one day, going upstairs to hide her misery, she found it lying on the ground with the glass smashed. She picked it up regretfully. The ring was still in the frame, the tack still securely in the wall, and she wondered how it could have fallen down. She wondered but for a moment, for, directly afterwards, she saw that no accident could have caused the damage which met her gaze. The bits of glass lay in a pile on the carpet, and the

face of the photograph had been hacked and sliced with a knife or scissors, so that where the features had smiled the yellow pasteboard now showed through—almost all of the picture that was left.

Beneath the wanton destruction of this, her only likeness of the dead, she shook like a reed. For a while she stood blanched, incapable of action, such a fury in her soul that speech seemed unattainably distant, and her unshapen thought was "God punish them!" Next, gathering the fragments together, she went down where they were all sitting, and held the ruin out in her hands.

"Who has done this?" she said.

Nobody answered. To do them justice only Sophie could have told.

"Do you see it?" she cried to her father, "it was the most I had of her. I hadn't

a thing, not one thing that belonged to her, that I valued like this! They knew, all of them knew, how fond of her I was. They knew they might have done anything to me rather than this. They knew nothing would hurt me so deeply or be so cruel, and that is why they did it—the cowards!"

He was silent.

"I suppose the servant let it fall," murmured Emilia. "What do you imagine — what are you in such a state about?"

"You do not suppose so! Would a servant have taken a knife and gashed it? It is like you, like you all, to try to shift the blame on to a poor servant. You haven't the courage to confess such an infamy yourselves, only the natures to do it! Oh, it was brave, it was great, to cut a dead woman's likeness because she was dear to

me—because you want to drive me into marrying Mr. Moses out of sheer disgust; and you may be gratified to hear you have created the disgust—such a thorough disgust that I shudder to think of you as my father's relations—but you have not made me accept a man I don't love—and you won't!"

Words poured from her without premeditation. All the scorn and detestation of these people that had been whirling in her breast flowed from her lips now like a stream of flame. She knew not what she was going to say, yet each phrase burnt and wounded as fiercely as if it had been rehearsed. But this could not go on for long.

"I am very glad Susan did break it," gasped Sophie; "the photograph was common rubbish, and so was your aunt!"

"She was as far above you as heaven is above earth!" exclaimed Violet, passionately. "She was a good woman, you are not. She was a gentlewoman, you will never be. She hardly realized that creatures like you existed!"

Sophie sprang forward and struck her across the eyes.

"Father!" shrieked the girl; then fell into a chair, and moaned.

"Your father will not protect you," Sophie muttered, vengefully. "You miserable waif, you give yourself airs because you have a sum of money nobody can touch, and forget that in the meanwhile you are living here on charity. What is your pound a week to pay for what you cost? You homeless beggar, you've got to be civil here or we'll turn you out!"

"Father!" she wailed for the third

time, and she stretched out her arms towards him.

Her father spoke.

"Violet," he said, sternly, "you must not insult my sister. And I consider you are very wrong altogether. You were taken in here out of kindness. You know yourself you are paying your grandmother scarcely anything for your keep, and you insist upon living on her when you see she can't afford it. I should have thought you would have had more self-respect."

She lifted her head and looked at him. It was the last straw; she was impotent to refute or to defend.

"It is true," whined the old woman. "I didn't like to say so, Bobbie, but if you want to know what first put me against your child, that is what it was. I never could abide anybody who was mean."

Tears were running down the white cheeks. Was the whole world against her? she questioned, dumbly; everybody save the one man who yearned to cherish her so desperately that he even denied the necessity for her loving in return—whose own love must indeed be illimitable, since it was vast enough for both? Thus she saw her suitor's offer, though, in truth, love is more greedy and less mad.

And, of course, they were married.

Within an hour of her affirmation that nothing on earth should cause her to change her resolve, she had listened to him again and uttered the "yes" of consent.

She had gone into the square, the house stifled her; she felt as abject a dependant in it as they had called her. She sat under the trees on the patchy grass. Few adults frequented the meagre enclosure, and it was

close on the children's bedtime, so only one youngster in knickerbockers, stopping up late for a treat, shared it with her, and she blessed Heaven for the comparative solitude. The brazen voices that had abused her still rang in her ears. The humiliation they had put her to was searing her very soul. She was not repentant for the reproaches by which she had brought it upon herself. So far from being contrite she wished only she had given her tongue greater rein than she had. Yet what would the most absolute of verbal victories have availed her had she won it? Her enemies were on their own ground, and she was an alien; and presently she would have to pass through their door once more, and be indebted for their shelter and take their food. She thought rather than the last she would prefer to abstain until death ended the struggle, but, of course, she

would be too hungry to resist shortly—if not to-day, to-morrow, and then she supposed she would have to pocket her pride, and eat. Faugh!

Providence alone knows what would have been the termination if Mr. Moses had not received a telegram from a benedict with whom he was to have dined, putting him off on account of his wife's indisposition, but, as it was, the stockbroker, with his evening before him and nothing to do, determined he would go to the Dyas's, and while Violet cried, and dried her eyes, and cried again on the rough bench inscribed with "Dick," and "Jack," and "I love Kate," she saw him alight from the cab.

She pictured scornfully the smirks and servility with which he was being greeted; speculated curiously what he would have

done—what any man with due respect for the conventionalities would have done—if he had arrived unnoticed in the midst of the late *fracas*. How awkward for him it would have been! Would he have constituted himself her champion, presuming it had been Mr. Moses, and proposed to her again before them all, begging her to wed him at once, and be free? No, that was quite too absurd. Probably he would have coughed to announce his presence, and everybody would have put on a society smile, and the intruder, wishing himself in mid-ocean, have really given a very fair imitation of remarking nothing extraordinary whatever.

By-and-by he came down the steps. She could see him quite plainly. The youngster in knickerbockers, finding the treat slow all alone, was going indoors, and as he

whistled himself out the gentleman in a silk hat and patent leather boots crossing the road signalled to him not to shut the gate. In another second it was slammed from the inside; the boy had taken to his heels, scampering home; and Leopold Moses stood on the gravel, scrutinizing the little black-robed figure under the laburnum tree.

"Miss Dyas," he said, walking briskly across to her, "how do you do? I have been sent to fetch you in."

And forthwith he deposited himself on the seat by her side.

"How are you, Mr. Moses? I didn't think anybody knew I was here."

"I am glad somebody did," he replied, "for I want to talk to you. Why have you been avoiding me lately—have I offended you?"

"Not at all," she said; "I haven't avoided you."

He looked at her and saw how pale she was.

Over the London square the twilight was deepening. Already in a few of the surrounding windows gas jets glimmered behind the blinds. He leant closer to her, and the pure brown eyes of the girl drooped under the hungry black ones of the man.

"What is the matter with you?" he said, softly. "Won't you tell me?"

The tone was not musical, but it was sympathetic, and she was unused to sympathy now. After the events of the day it unhinged her, so that when she strove to say something ordinary about their being expected back, there was a catch in her voice which compelled her to break off.

"What is it?" he repeated, "what is your trouble, . . . darling?"

She bowed her head, and played nervously with a withered leaf fallen from the twigs above into her lap. For a minute he too was silent, waiting for her to speak, and in the pause her heart throbbed as fast as if she were in love. She seemed to hear his last words echoed back on the air—"What is your trouble, . . . darling?" Then in the dusk, her gaze still bent upon the grass beyond, she felt a big warm hand steal upon her own, and seize it suddenly in a fast clasp. She sat quite quiet and unresisting with this hand holding hers; it appeared to her, in a kind of momentary stupefaction, as if the development of the drama were no longer dependent on her, and all she had to do was to see what happened. The numbness passed, and as she asked her-

self what she intended, and realized that she was incapable of deciding, his arm crept round her waist. She shook it from her, and rose swiftly. In the darkness of the garden they confronted each other.

"For God's sake, have me," he said, hoarsely; "I can't live without you! Violet, have me. I'll be good to you, I swear it. Don't go away, listen! You do like me, don't you—you wouldn't flirt with me and send me mad for nothing, just to amuse yourself? Marry me, say you will. Violet, I love you; come to me, oh, my beautiful, my dear!"

He drew nearer—nearer yet. She did not retreat, and next—she knew she had meant permission, but never how she had signified it—he had caught her tightly to him, and she was clasped in his embrace.

"You will be my wife?"

"Yes," she said.

The earliest star shone serenely in the heavens; over the way, the indefatigable pianist had returned to his labours on Mendelssohn's "Spring." And as the first bars of the melody floated out across the square, the rough moustache brushed the virgin lips, and she understood by that kiss she was engaged.

CHAPTER XIV.

And she had neither bridesmaids nor orange-blossoms, nor a long train, nor an impressive service; for the Jews are less tolerant than the Protestants in one grave respect, and a person of different creed from theirs cannot be married in a synagogue, though a Jew or Jewess may be wedded at a Christian altar. And if she had been somewhat in love the lack of these adjuncts, which a girlish mind is accustomed to regard as an indivisible part of matrimony, would have saddened her; and if she had loved deeply she would not have cared a scrap; and

being, as she was, possessed of a little friendly, grateful feeling, and that was all, she did not care either, but viewed the compromise of the Registry Office, like everybody else, as a simple method of surmounting Moses's objection to going through the ceremony in a church. Once he had asked her if she was opposed to being made a Jewess, and she had answered "Yes," point blank, and he did not refer to the subject again.

She had a respectable *trousseau*, if it boasted no white satin. She had told her father she wished it bought with the remainder of the two hundred pounds she had entrusted to his charge, and, as there was no remainder, though all that had come to her from the spending were the two frocks presented to her on her arrival, Robert privately borrowed three hundred

from his future son-in-law, and, pocketing half, handed a hundred and fifty for her equipment to the spinsters, who "shopped" for her right royally, and, during the next twelve months, "turned" their old dresses with such surprising results that one might easily have been pardoned for believing them to be new.

How fond they all were of her in the betrothal period, to be sure! No sooner had the engagement been announced than she was completely overwhelmed by their felicitations and affection; and the charming histrionic effort late on the eventful night by Aunt Sophie: how she hesitated and looked uncertain, and then, her tenderness mastering her, stepped forward and declared quite tremulously she *must* say she was "Very, very glad," although, perhaps, Violet would never forgive her temper, and did not want congratulations from *her?*

"But, oh, my child," she exclaimed, pathetically, "why did you think such awful things of us, to imagine a servant's carelessness was our wicked spite!"

"You are very kind," the girl had answered, coldly; "it's all over now, so it isn't any use referring to it. The topic can never be anything but a very painful one to us both."

And her grandmamma? Her grandmamma blessed her; and brought out her handkerchief with emotion, and blessed her again. Her father sickened her the least, with him the transition was more artistic; he was, in fact, often wondering if the effect of the quarrel would have been the same if he had not interfered. Of the lot, Leopold was the only one who was sincere, and having plenty of money he demonstrated his adoration magnificently.

There is an erroneous idea, which has given rise to many a funny story, that the Jews, as a race, are mean. Few mistakes could be further from the truth; the Jews —speaking not of the "wardrobe dealers" of Houndsditch, who are of the calibre of their Christian neighbours, nor of the *élite* of the community which corresponds socially to the *élite* of any other, but meaning the middle-class or "Maida Vale" Jews—are liberal to excess. They are recklessly extravagant not only upon their own pleasures but in their friendly relations with others. Be sure it was a Jew who, seeking some article up West, and informed by the obsequious salesman that a specimen which failed to satisfy him was "the best obtainable," said: "Possibly; but the best isn't good enough!" Their generosity may not always be coupled with taste; the muni-

ficence frequently verges on ostentation, but stinginess at least is not their fault, and Mr. Moses's gifts to Violet between the evening in the square and the date of the union fairly bewildered the Dyas's by their splendour. No Christian gentleman in a similar position to the *fiancé's* would have dreamed of purchasing such offerings as the stockbroker brought and sent to the little house in Westbourne Park. The ring on her finger alone was of a value that had caused Robert, able to appreciate it, to send up his eyebrows till they seemed in danger of never coming down again, and to marvel in astonishment how a man could be so insane. Baskets of orchids, and sweets in satin boxes, each more fantastic than the last, were delivered daily; and though the intervening months were but two, she had received, before she became his wife, so many

diamonds that it would be preposterous for her ever to attempt to wear them all at once.

On a bleak November morning it was that she was driven to the Registrar's, round her neck a locket from Mr. Finlason, who had been in town, and now was back in Chester; and in the first snow of the season, looking the same little girl who, fifteen months before, had written innocent tales in Powis Lodge, she came out on the pavement Mrs. Leopold Moses, the feathery flakes settling and glistening, as she got into the hired brougham, on the loose childish hair the bridegroom had laughingly forbidden her to "do up."

After that there had been a good deal of champagne flavoured with the maudlin hypocrisy people too often talk on these occasions, and which here was several degrees more hypocritical than usual, and

then came the "good-byes." She was in the brougham again, alone now with her husband; he was telling her not to cry, and she was surprised to learn that he supposed she had anything to cry about.

Her sensation as they rolled along to the station was relief mixed with nervousness. She was relieved not only to be free from the family, but to feel that the bustle and confusion of the last week was at an end, and, though she trembled, as yet she scarcely realized what a change in her life the morning had effected, or what a responsibility she had assumed. She lay back, looking thoughtfully through the window upon the whitened streets. He, elated and excited, lolled upon the cushions too, his reflections in one particular identical with hers—a supreme satisfaction that the worry of the affair was over.

They went to Paris and the Riviera. They arrived in Paris on the second day of the honeymoon, and he lost no time in showing her the wonders of the finest capital of civilization, introducing her only to such sights as he himself admired, and thus avoiding the danger, common to sight-seers, of being bored. Not that he reasoned so, it would be a phenomenally selfish man who humoured the failing a week after the wedding; he simply took it for granted that to dine at Bignon's and go to the theatre would gratify her highest tastes because they gratified his own, and that she could care to stare at statuary and pictures which the papers were no longer puffing never occurred to him, since for himself—well, in museums and that sort of place he always yawned his head off.

He was intoxicated with his joy, and it

was not until having exhausted so many, he had to consider what amusement there was for them to go to at night, that he noticed his wife was less interested in the question than he.

For Paris to Violet was as yet what any large town would have been—a whirligig of lamps and humanity, a confused procession of dazzling pictures which passed before her blurred and massed. In the whole brilliant city she saw plainly but two things: herself and him. She could not forget them, they haunted her; she was filled with intermittent cravings to get away from herself, then to get away—for an hour, for half-an-hour—from him! How much rested with him at this stage he did not know, nor did she. Yet, in her vague emotions, often contradictory, there was the unsuspected germ which could have been fostered—not by

wines and *ballets*, but by the tact of sensibility—till it flourished into love. She had commenced by being flattered by his attentions; there was nothing complimentary to him in that, for the best woman is flattered by the admiration of the worst man, and the more circumspect her conduct the greater her secret pride, since down in her heart unacknowledged lurks the thought: "If I who am so good and never flirt have subdued him like this, how attractive I must be!" But from deriving pleasure from his attentions, Violet had grown to like Leopold; and besides liking him she had come to him grateful for the release he represented to her and for his lavish adulation, and gratitude, as well as being the rarest of the sentiments, is the one capable of the most remarkable developments. Furthermore, a woman, especially a very young woman,

dependent for companionship upon one man, *wants* to love him, whether she is aware of it or not. The desire to love, as to be loved, is a natural instinct governed by circumstances, and any man with whom she begins her married life can wake her affections if he knows the way, though she went to the altar as insentient as a pillar of ice. Mr. Moses did not know the way; it never struck him to try to find it. And this was not because he was ignorant of the conditions which had influenced her to accept his hand, and deemed her devoted to him, but because he was at present so utterly satisfied and content that it was not in his temperament to imagine a sweeter delight than what he held.

From the Riviera the couple went to Galicia. A Spanish acquaintance of the bridegroom, encountered in Cannes, had sung

the praises of Vigo, and thither they bent their steps for the last resort of the trip. It was Leopold's proposition, and she assented readily; tired of fashion, the prospect of rest and simplicity attracted her, and though she was a shade surprised that the description had been alluring to him, the surprise was an agreeable one. Leopold was rather surprised also; he was on very good terms with himself about it; having decided that he would like the orthodox *solitude à deux* contained in his holiday, there had inevitably followed the exhilarating thought: "How wisely I have married; in the final week when men are usually wishing for a return to society, behold I desire retirement," and he did not see that, not having as yet abandoned society, in this reversal of the customary order he was merely hankering for a change after all.

Once thrown upon their own resources, however, and reduced to conversation for pastime (in Vigo there being few others), both made the immediate discovery, how slightly their intimacy had advanced. To her it was more of a shock than to him; indeed, at the start, he rather relished the perception of what a novelty she still was: there was the promise of a piquant flavour, an odd originality, in the programme of flirting all day long with a stranger who was, nevertheless, his wife, and he was disappointed to prove it so much less amusing than he had expected. Having the right to embrace her as often as he chose, anything short of it seemed ridiculous and waste of time. He could not take pleasure in gazing into her eyes now that they were his property, nor thrill in touching her finger-tips, when he knew that, whenever he

liked, he could kiss her. And, forsaking the ideal for the practical, it was not long after she had begun to wish impatiently, "he would let her alone," that his ardour in the pursuit abated.

There came pauses; neither of them knew what to say. When she talked spontaneously he obviously found her "dry;" when she broke the silence from a sense of duty, she was herself uninterested in what she was saying, and still more so in his responses. Then Mr. Moses would light a cigar, and each of them stare dumbly out into the bay, and think. She thought they did not have much in common, and wondered if people generally married with kindred sympathies or gained them from the association; he thought she was awfully pretty, but "young." Till, dwelling upon the physical beauty which appealed to

him, he turned round and kissed her again, when the caresses, having no exchange or identity of ideas to inspire them, wearied her by their inappropriateness, and palled on him because he had only had recourse to them for lack of anything else to do.

So by degrees his demonstrations became fewer. Sitting beside anybody mutely, or talking about the dulness of Vigo, with an incidental variation in the shape of an allusion to the curaçoa and amer picon at its little *café* on the cliff, is not calculated to imbue one with a yearning to press one's mouth to that person's: kissing, to be enjoyable, demanding a mental stimulus in which the topic of dulness is deficient; and the ripples on the water were contemplated with increased attentiveness by Violet, and his telegrams and newspapers perused less hurriedly by Mr. Moses.

They noticed each other's peculiarities; this is as sure an indication of how long the honeymoon has lasted as the almanac. The way he had of smoking his cigar at an obtuse angle, and scowling when he was in the most amiable of moods, irritated her. She thought he looked vulgar, too, in light suits. Her untrammelled hair had been the subject of several audible impertinences in the course of their peregrinations, and he opined she must be very dense not to wear it like other women. When they were in the streets he was continually dreading that somebody was going to say something rude. "Nothing exasperated him like density!"

But, perhaps, the evenings were the worst of all in their sitting-room of the hotel, where, after she had sung, and inwardly observed that he no longer offered to turn over the leaves for her, they abstractedly and

respectively essayed every arm-chair the apartment boasted, and ultimately wandered about in a purposeless manner until one of them yawned. In sheer desperation, then, she would hazard some remark, inane from the oppression that had begotten it, and he would reply sleepily, and, rather as a concession to politeness, put an irrelevant question which produced another interrogatory from her; and when this unsatisfactory form of dialogue was exhausted, a second yawn, more prolonged and undisguised than the first, would seem to announce that her husband was within measurable distance of regret.

It is to be presumed Othello yawned, sometimes, with all his passion for the lady he had won, and that there were moments when Romeo yawned, too; but it is, nevertheless, an indisputable fact that to a young

wife a yawn from her lord teems with capabilities for well nigh unlimited interpretation, and inevitably appears to reflect slightingly upon her qualifications and her charms.

It is curious she should endow the simple expansion of his facial muscles with such a depth of significance, but she does. When he wrinkles his brow she feels he is mourning his mistake, and when he gapes she thinks pathetically of her mother.

Violet had no mother to meditate on; she did not even have any letters to look forward to, which are ordinarily of incalculable worth to the month-made bride in danger of monotony, but she did allow herself to review the past in those long gaps between the last question and the next, and to speculate, in the pauses, on the thoughts of the big man stretched on the couch

so moodily, with his heavy habitual frown. She speculated on them the evening before they were to go back to London. She was standing by the windows, gazing out into the night; he had left the sofa, and was toying mechanically with a paper-knife and an old pack of cards which she had discovered the day before in one of the drawers. She tapped restlessly on the glass; he sat fiddling with the things on the table, knife, cards, pen, everything within reach. Both had their eyes wide open as people have when they are seeing less of what they are doing than of what they have done or might do.

Before her lay the bay, which runs up for miles from the Atlantic between high blue cliffs. Under these cliffs, gaunt and mysterious now, it shimmered in the moonlight like a lake. To her right, refined

by distance, borrowing from the radiant solemnity of the rest a poetic suggestion of home, lights twinkled peacefully from the town upon the hill. The scene was at once beautiful and grand, and the sublimity on the one side and the tenderness on the other, the moan of the water flowing in upon the beach—all had their influence upon her reverie.

From her own interests she mused indeterminately on subjects to which she could have given no name. She was filled with an abrupt sense of the littleness of human aims, the incongruous unimportance of schemes, disappointments, and lives to the immensity of creation. What were people's puny careers, spun like a spider's web a breath could banish, to the perpetuity of the earth they struggled on, the eternal unknown from which they had sprung, the vastness to which,

from their bank-books and accounts, they would be recalled. What did it matter if they succeeded or failed for such a little while; how could anybody ever forget how trivial it was, how puerile, this striving so much for what could last so short a time. Dimly she wondered whether, if the recollection of Eternity were more constantly in one's mind, one would not be happier and freer from cares. She could not suppose a woman who fully realized that her existence on the globe was as a second to a billion centuries would fret much what the second held.

A desire to utter some part of this, to pour out the fancies that were crowding her brain in speech, came to her, as it used to come when something had puzzled her as a child with Bertha. The murmur of the tide was borne upon her ears like an

uncomprehended song, waking an echo, half joy, half pain, and wholly undefined, in her soul. Her head drooped upon her bosom, in her throat a knot gathered and fought for mastery; she was possessed by a passionate yearning for comfort though she knew not what was her grief—an intense longing to hear passionate words and feel the strong embrace of her husband's arms!

"Come here, my dear," he said suddenly, "and I'll teach you how to play 'Bluff'!"

He had picked up the cards, and was quite cheerful at the notion. Over her the offer had swept like a rush of chill air; yet a vestige of what had been surging in her breast lingered still, and in passing behind him she leant one hand on his shoulder, and waited for the answering touch.

"Must I learn?" she asked, softly. "Do you want me to learn very much,

. . . Leo?" and as she spoke she stooped till her hair touched his cheek.

He dealt her a "hand" deliberately.

"Why, yes," he said; "you'll feel an awful duffer if you can't play when we're in town. Why don't you come and sit down?"

She drew a long breath, and took the seat he had indicated.

"You know the value of cards?" he said; "an 'ace' is the highest. Well, you hold your five cards up, and look for 'pairs'—two 'fours,' two 'tens,' two of anything is a 'pair'—and then throw away the ones that are no use. You see you have two 'queens,' so you discard, and buy three. You could buy five, but that's no game, and, of course, with a 'pair' three are all you want. You understand, naturally, I should not know

what you have if I were not teaching you! You hope to buy in another small 'pair,' or another 'queen'; if you drew another 'queen' you would have 'threes'; 'threes' is a good hand—there are lots finer, but I won't show you too much at once! I have three 'fives'; you would not know if I didn't tell you, but you might guess I held 'threes' because I only buy two cards—always watch how many everybody buys! Well, supposing I am the 'blind,' it is your bet (you did buy another 'queen,' great Scot!); you bet—say a shilling. Now, I can put a shilling in the pool to 'call' you—that is, pay a shilling to see whose cards are the best, and who takes the money—or I can throw up if I don't think mine are as good as yours, and save that shilling. But I do neither: I have three 'fives,'

and I reckon you have only 'a pair,' or two 'pairs' at most, and I say 'a shilling *better*,' that means 'more.' You feel confident your hand beats mine, so you raise it yet another shilling. Say it, 'A shilling better'!"

"A shilling better!"

"That's right. Well, it goes on 'better' and 'better' until one of us gets frightened to go any higher, and 'calls' the other at last, and then the best hand reaps the advantage of the continued betting; in this case yours is the best. As a rule, four or five people play—it is nothing with two. Do you begin to see daylight?"

"Did you say that in London I should be expected to play it?" she inquired, absently. "Do the Jewesses play, then, as well as the men?"

"Rather," he responded; "but I'll teach you more of 'Bluff' than any one of them knows! Women have no heads for it: when they are getting the cards they hold their money so tight they're afraid to bet them up, and when the luck's dead against them they rush the game!"

"Do they?" she observed. She was wondering what sort of society this was into which she was about to be initiated.

"Yes," he said. "Shall we go on?"

"I feel tired—I will learn another time; my head aches!"

"Just as you like; no doubt a sleep will set you right. Are you subject to headaches—you seem always getting them?"

"I have had one other since we were married," she said.

She had had one other. It had been in Paris one night, when they had returned from seeing a new extravaganza, the feature of which was an audacious "transformation dancer," who, in a variety of lightning metamorphoses, changed from a Ballerina to a Nautch-girl, and from a Nautch-girl to a Cupid, till she suggested that her final change must be to the state in which she was born; and Mr. Moses had left his supper in a frenzy of solicitude, and gone out and bought eau-de-cologne and smelling-salts and other things. She noticed that this evening he had "no doubt a sleep would set her right."

But she only answered carelessly, "Probably it will!" and moved towards the door, leaving him seeking a match for his cigar.

Alone, she undressed slowly; the moon-

light was streaming in between the curtains, killing the flame of the candle; it touched her where she knelt in prayer, as if with a Divine caress. And then, while the white-robed form bent beside the bed with moving lips, a voice came from the next room:

"I think I'll go down and get a drink, my dear," she heard her husband say, gloomily, "—— heigho!"

CHAPTER XV.

The resumption of business evidently did Mr. Moses good, and when he came home of an evening he was always in good spirits. They had rented a house in Maida Vale, of course; Maida Vale, to the middle-class Jew, is well-nigh inevitable; when one takes a house anywhere else it is because Maida Vale has none to let. It was one of the handsomest residences in the district, if that district does not warrant the description of "picturesque," and it had been furnished by the best people in town. Indeed, the

experience of the firm, the suggestions of Violet, and the cheques drawn by the stockbroker, had left few shortcomings in connection with the interior, at any rate, and the drawing-room was perfect.

The artist sent to inspect and report on its capabilities had been struck by the beautiful girl's eye for colour and effect, and on that account had, perhaps, interested himself a shade more than he would have felt bound to do for another couple in Caractacus Crescent. Anyhow, he had weighed the respective claims of marble and bronze, and strawberry and terra-cotta, to a nicety, and Violet, as she contemplated the result in the first days of their installation was entranced.

She would have been more than human —disagreeably more—if the possession of a finer abode than she had ever seen, a

larger allowance than she had ever dreamed of, and a novel authority over three servants had not brought a sensation of pleasure in their train. She was, at the onset, like a child with a new toy, and with her husband's return to his former cheerfulness, if not quite his earlier ardour, her only anxiety was to have decided upon her orders by the time the cook inquired about dinner.

And here her life with Bertha Carroll, simple as it had been, stood her in good stead. She was not likely to make the blunders of a Dora in her estimation of a joint, nor to be helplessly dependent on her domestics' hints. Leopold was no epicure; providing there was plenty to eat he was content, and since the extravagance did not extend to the table, her remembrance of Powis Lodge was an admirable basis for invention.

They breakfasted together, and then he kissed her and departed more or less hurriedly for the City, leaving her to her own devices till nightfall. She looked very charming at breakfast, and had abandoned the deep lace collars for tight-fitting ones of linen, worn with a glimpse of cuff and solitaire; and he found his matutinal meals, presided over by a pretty woman, a vast improvement on the invariable eggs and doubtful coffee of his bachelorship. Her programme during his absence was characterized by a certain amount of sameness, but though the principal distractions it held were to practise and read in front of the fire, it was pleasurable to play accompaniments on a "Bechstein," and to feel she had all the resources of the "Grosvenor" to dive into for books.

On the third afternoon after they had

moved in, while she was struggling to be entertained by the latest ephemeral production in three volumes, his sister called to break her solitude, and she said, inwardly, "I shall go up, and be very nice."

When a woman says, "I shall go up, and be very nice," on hearing a visitor's name, that woman does not like the visitor much, though the discovery that she does not may not yet be made.

Mrs. Rosenstein was a lady who was not forty. She bore a strong resemblance to her brother, and dressed in startling combinations which were said (by her) to come from Worth. Poor man! these "Parisian" costumes were so loud, that when she made a call it was frequently unnecessary for her to knock at the door.

She was examining a statuette of "Eve" when Violet entered, and turned and

scanned the advancing figure through her *pince nez* as if she found it rather a matter for surprise her hostess should intrude.

"Ah," she said, languidly, tendering her a cheek, "how are you, my dear?"

There is no affection implied by the term "my dear" among this section of the Jews; they interpolate it into almost every sentence, using it so continually that the phrase, which one of the greatest English novelists calls "that sweet and simple name," has ultimately not the faintest significance to them. It is wonderful that they manage to avoid saying, "A yard and three-quarters, my dear," to the young man who serves them with "frilling."

"How do you do?" said Violet. "How kind of you! Those coals *are* burning badly; won't you come downstairs?"

"Oh, I can only stop five minutes; I

have been at Mrs. Rudolph Jacobs', and thought I'd look in. By-the-by, she was asking about you."

"About me?" exclaimed the girl.

"They have all heard of you. Leopold was so popular, you know, and his marriage has been quite the topic everywhere. She told me she was going to call on you soon; everybody is sure to. Of course, you sent cards?"

"Oh, yes," she answered; "Mrs. Rudolph Jacobs must have been one of those envelopes. I was forgetting; Leopold gave me such a number of addresses."

"Ah, he was *very* popular," repeated the other in the tone in which a person insinuates, "I could say plenty more, but I won't." "He might have married almost whom he chose," she added an instant later.

"So he did," replied Mrs. Moses, "quite." And she rang the bell for the parlourmaid. "Will you have tea or wine?" she questioned, changing the subject.

Mrs. Rosenstein would take nothing . . . well, then, wine for preference, if she must have one of the two.

"I won't disguise from you," she said, sipping a glass of port, "that there has been a good deal of talk about my brother marrying a Christian. I think you ought to know; it seems only right."

"Well," demanded Violet, "what can I do if there has?"

"Your manner, you understand! You are younger than I am, and I can speak frankly. So much will depend on your manner! A newly-married girl cannot be too careful of her 'manner' when

she is first launched in her husband's set."

"But," she cried, bewildered and uneasy, "what about my manner? Is it so unfortunate? What should I alter?"

Mrs. Rosenstein coughed.

"Leopold himself would be your best adviser," she answered; "only men are so stupid in these matters! A little tact, my dear, a little *savoir-faire* is all that is required. Recollect the 'art of concealing ignorance,' as . . . as . . . some very famous writer so wittily said, is invaluable, really invaluable, when we are presented to a phase of society we are not 'at home' in." She spoke as if her sister-in-law were about to dine at Court. "You will meet people who have naturally some slight curiosity about you, of resentment even; and for Leopold's sake, I . . ."

"'Resentment?' Do you mean I shall be criticized by the women he might have proposed to, and didn't?"

"I mean you will meet on equal terms mothers twenty years your seniors, who wanted him for their own daughters. Yes. Leopold was a 'catch,' there can be no two opinions about that! Be conciliating—a little deference will not be thrown away. As a Christian . . ." and so on *ad infinitum.*

She meant well, although her remarks were addressed to her brother's wife rather than to Violet; but when she rose to go, the effect of her visit had been to leave the girl supremely uncomfortable. The prospect of entertaining a host of strangers all ready to decry and ridicule her, haunted her, and, after dinner, she admitted something of the kind to her husband.

"Oh," he said, "let them go and hang themselves! What need you care what they think?"

"I care because you will care," she urged. "You may not fancy so now, but if your friends made fun of me and you saw it, you would be bitterly ashamed by-and-by."

"Ashamed!" he echoed, "of you? Do you know what a beautiful woman you are, Vi? Come here, witch!"

He half led, half carried her to the pier-glass, planting her before it.

"There," he said, putting his cigar in his mouth, and holding back her head with both hands, "look at yourself and see!"

She blushed brightly.

"Are you glad it belongs to you?" she whispered, smiling at the reflection.

"You bet!" he responded. "Now, you

may go and finish your coffee, and don't worry yourself about trifles!"

"I do so want to please them, though," she said, impulsively; "I should hate myself if you were laughed at through me. You would be bound to realize it, you would *feel* it—and every time you glanced at me, you would think of another friend I had estranged from you—of somebody else who thought you had been foolish to make me your wife."

"Bosh!" he said.

"It isn't bosh! What recompense for the loss of his world's esteem can a man find in one little woman, unless . . ."

"Drink your coffee, and don't be childish!"

"Leopold," she said, earnestly, "these ideas have not quite come to me to-day, all at once; they have been growing in my

brain. I believe they sprang into existence in Vigo, when you were telling me of the Jewish card parties. It was a small thing, but it showed me how complete a change from all I was accustomed to our marriage would mean. And now I understand what a responsibility mine is—how a girl a man takes to share his life *represents* him. Her mistakes are his mistakes, her omissions are the blunders for which he must suffer, her ignorance is his disadvantage more than her own. How dearly, how truly, he must love her to risk all this!"

"Of course," he answered, "a fellow doesn't go and propose to a girl he isn't sweet on."

"No," she murmured, "it is a woman's sin to wed without love!"

He was very dull, this man; yet, had he been desirous of more than he possessed

even he must have caught something of what was passing in her mind as she leant against the drapery of the mantelpiece with her face bent down to the blaze. But he was sluggishly content, and after the exertion of the looking-glass joke had made himself comfortable for the rest of the evening. His dinner, the warmth of the room, the depths of the velvet chair, and the knowledge that she belonged to him, gorged him mentally and physically, and he would have been astonished to hear there were reasonable grounds for supposing he might be unhappy.

"I don't know," he said, ponderously, emitting a wreath of smoke; "after all, see how many men marry ugly women for their chips!"

If the languor of digestion had not already set in! If men only suspected how

much their wives may be thinking while they hum a snatch of tune so carelessly, or settle a flower so frivolously, or give that little ambiguous laugh which sounds absurd. If, by some gift of the gods, a husband were permitted to divine what comes and goes under the impenetrable countenance of his helpmate between his hasty demonstrations of Monday morning and Saturday eve, which, more often than not, are ill-timed, assuredly there would be a fall in self-esteem!

She took up the "Special Edition" he had brought in with him, scarcely cognizant of what had been stirring in her own breast —sensible merely of a dreary conviction she must be a poor companion which would deepen later into the feeling that he was uncompanionable; and he went to sleep.

Next morning the Misses Dyas were announced, chirpy and infantile, the treble

and the bass blended in a duet of delight, they greeted and caressed her, and stayed to luncheon. Excepting the patriarch, the last of the group to come and envy the luxury of her surroundings was her father; but he was not long behind the others, and dropped in casually about dinner-time. Mr. Moses, watching him putting away the Burgundy, wondered if Violet cared for her relations much and wanted them there. He trusted not, for he had no intention of sending any more money after the initial three hundred lent to the gaily-impecunious parent, and had, besides, conceived a cordial dislike for her aunts.

It was on Saturday that Robert had come to the Crescent, and his son-in-law had indulged in these meditations, and the ensuing dawn heralded the pair's first Sunday in their permanent home. Leopold attended

no synagogue, and since she had married, Violet had never been to Church, in the travel and shyness of the honeymoon being loath to refer to it. With the return to quietude, though, the longing, never silenced, had taken full hold of her, and some of the sunshine when she rose this Sabbath seemed to have tinged her heart as she reflected there was no impediment now to her gratifying it.

While she was dispensing the eggs and bacon at breakfast—he had no nonsensical objection to eating pork—she told him she meant to go.

He stared, and then manifested the difference between his habitual frown and a frown of annoyance.

"Want to go to Church?" he cried, amazed. "Oh—very well; go on!"

She had frequently been by herself when

in Virginia Square, but here her complete strangeness to the neighbourhood rendered the prospect of seeking a church alone a shade embarrassing, and when she came into the dining-room, presently, buttoning her gloves, she hesitated. He had unfolded the "Observer," but was obviously not getting on with it, and at last she said, rather nervously:

"You wouldn't take me, would you?"

"I?" he ejaculated. "Not much. I don't know why you are going at all."

"I always have gone. I daresay people can be quite as good without, but I miss it, and . . ."

"I haven't said you shan't," he returned, irritably; "go along, only you can't expect me to accompany you!"

"I suppose not," she confessed. "Well, *au revoir!*"

"I must say, though," he remarked as she turned, "I hope nobody will be at the windows. There would be a fine scandal if Mrs. Leopold Moses were seen on her way to Church; wouldn't the tongues wag to-night!"

"I can't see where the 'scandal' would come in," she rejoined; "everybody has a right to follow her religion. I didn't think it 'scandalous' when all Maida Vale flocked by with prayer-books yesterday."

"Well, you could go to *Shool*, the same as they were doing, if you must go somewhere. You are a Jewess now, my dear, and all this sort of performance is out of place."

"I am a Christian, as I have always been," she said, "and you understood I remained one all along. Why, none of your ministers would read a blessing over us. If

I were willing to go to—what do you call it, '*Shool*'—I daresay they wouldn't let me in."

"Oh, don't talk twaddle," he retorted. "If you insist on going to Church, I can't hold you back, but you are aware yourself it makes me look like a fool."

"You are awfully unkind," she said; "you know how anxious I am that your friends shall approve your choice, and yet you speak like this!"

He rustled the sheets of the paper impatiently, and she contemplated her hymn-book.

"What will it lead to?" he exclaimed at length. "What do you anticipate ultimately? You are not a child. *You* go to Church on Sunday mornings; *my* family have always been Jews—I look to the future."

She sat down and pressed her lips very tightly together. "Don't let us talk about it any more," she said, coldly, taking off her hat. "I am not going, so the discussion can end."

But the sun no longer shined to her; she comprehended that by this concession she was pledging herself to abstain from all public worship for years, and she comprehended his last words, too. She saw by them that a quarrel must come later, a battle which she would fight with all the authority of the woman's belief, and the more determinedly for her compliance in the present when submission merely affected herself. Still, she had given in to him now, and she thought he might with advantage have shown himself a trifle more conscious of the fact. By-and-by, she went upstairs, and read prayers for half-an-hour in solitude,

and then her husband interrupted her for the purpose of shaving.

"Anything in the 'Observer?'" she inquired with an effort, putting the Service in its shabby case aside.

"No," he responded, proceeding to lather his chin, "nothing! I suppose we shall have a deuce of a crowd here to-day, my dear; the best part of the people we have sent cards to will come."

She had not known it, and the information served to intensify her sense of the disparity between her bringing up and the obligations of her new position.

"What time?" she asked.

"About four, probably. Tell what's-the-girl's-name, Reece, to put out the decanters and biscuits."

"I'd have liked to get a cake," she said.

"Well, of course, there should have been cakes. Why didn't you?"

"You never mentioned anything about it," she reminded him.

"'Mention!' it's for a woman to think of these things, not a man! There, now I've cut myself. I wish you wouldn't chatter to me while I'm shaving, my dear; if there's anyone near, it fidgets me."

"Then why don't you go and shave in your dressing-room?" she said. "I'll send one of the servants round to Botting's at once to see what she can do."

The tradespeople in the locality of Caractacus Crescent are not unused to being rung up on Sundays by flurried domestics requesting confectionery or two dozen of soda-water or the like, and the deficiency was remedied before Mr. Moses

descended with a piece of court-plaister concealing his cut.

At a quarter to four, the young wife, wandering about the drawing-room awaiting the first arrival, was seized with a truly feminine inspiration which attracted her lord's notice. She poured a suspicion of wine into two or three of the glasses arranged in that orderly circle on the salver, and crumbled a macaroon on one of the plates.

"What on earth are you doing?" he demanded.

She looked up at him, and smiled.

"Nobody will be able to feel herself the earliest visitor," she said, with a little complacent nod. "See?"

"By George!" he cried, amused, "that's smart. Halloa, there's a brougham stopping!"

Mr. Moses's acquaintances were a great boon to various London livery-stables; few of them had their own conveyances, and the Jews, higher and middle class also, have a strong aversion to driving in omnibuses.

It was Mrs. Abishua Simmons. She was a large woman with a rosy face, who, in the far-distant period when she had had a figure and a second-hand furniture shop in the Walworth Road, might have been good looking. To-day, Abishua was a bill-discounter in an office up West, and she went to see Bernhardt in the stalls, and quoted Ollendorf.

"Mrs. Simmons," said Leopold, "my wife!"

"Delighted to meet you, my dear. How are you? I'm sure I hope we shall be fast friends."

"Thank you," answered Violet. "I have no doubt we shall."

She wondered if it was wickeder to tell stories on Sunday than on any other day.

"Abishua has the gout, Mr. Moses. He was so vexed he couldn't come with me, but he sent his kind regards."

"Mr. and Mrs. Levy!" announced Reece.

Mr. and Mrs. Levy had had a row on the way. She had left her card-case behind, and as they proposed calling upon several other couples in the belief they would be out, he had scolded her. Her face was shiny as she came forward; she had been too flustered to powder it.

"Mrs. Levy," said Leopold, "my wife; Mr. Levy, my wife. Mrs. Simmons, you know Mrs. Levy?"

"Oh, my, yes," they answered together; "and how are the children, my dear?"

"It is only I who have the pleasure of meeting everybody for the first time," murmured Violet; "never mind, I must forget I am sorry to be a stranger now, and think instead how glad I shall be when I have so many friends later on!"

"Very good," said Mr. Levy, approvingly; "very well put, indeed!"

Another pair entered. Their name was "Israel," and one was not surprised that it should be.

"Mrs. Israel," said Leopold, mechanically, "my wife. Mr. Israel . . . allow me to introduce you to—Mrs. Moses!"

He had contrived to effect some variation on the formula, and felt happier. "Mrs. Levy, let me give you a glass of wine!"

Mrs. Levy let him; everybody partook.

"Did you go anywhere last night, my dear?" asked Mrs. Israel of her hostess. "No? Ah well, wrapped up in each other yet awhile, no doubt! We went to the 'Gaiety;' it is screamingly funny. Mr. Moses, why didn't you take your wife to the 'Gaiety,' selfish man?"

"I mean to book seats for next Saturday," he replied. "Ah, Joshua, how d'ye do? Mr. Raphael, my wife!"

"Charmed!" said Joshua.

He then sank into a *prie dieu*, and seemed lost in debating on what portion of his attire he might have stuck another pearl.

The room filled rapidly; a hum of voices ever and anon rising shrilly with, "And on a full hand, my dear," or "Queens ahead, and took the pool," ascended from all sides. Mrs. Rosenstein was expatiating to Violet on the advisability of counting

your cards at Bluff before you pick them up. Mr. Aarons, familiarly known as "Dapper Dan," had buttonholed his host, and was recounting an opponent's astonishing "buy" of a straight flush on a "jack" and a "king," by which he had dropped thirty pounds on four eights. A diversion was created by the departure of Mrs. Simmons and the entry of Mrs. Lazarus.

"Bring your wife round to us this evening, Mr. Moses," whispered the former as she took her leave, "only a small affair! two tables, perhaps! I've just been telling her there must be no ceremony between us, but she wasn't sure if you'd go out."

"Thanks," he said, "I shall be very pleased."

Until five o'clock the assembly averaged a score; as Mr. and Mrs. Abrahams left, the gathering was reinforced by Mr. and Mrs.

Moss. But after five there were no more peals at the front door bell, and the room thinned, until finally Mrs. Moses breathed a sigh of relief and thanked goodness it was over. She thought they had all gone away with a favourable impression of her, she had done her best to give it to them, though under the circumstances there had not been much opportunity to be more than generally and uniformly amiable; and she hoped, now they were alone, her husband would speak a word of praïse. To do him justice he was feeling very proud of her just then—or rather of his own selection—and if he had dreamed what she wanted of him, would have done it instantly. It was one of those things a man cannot conjecture; if he understands it is sympathetic intuition, so all he said was:

"I promised Mrs. Simmons we'd go round to her for an hour this evening;

it was friendly of her to ask us; we must give our housewarming soon."

She assented languidly. After the altercation about Church, she felt as disinclined to plead her aversion to making one of a card party on Sunday, as she did to go.

"Wear your diamonds," he added.

He had never displayed so much interest in her *toilette* as when she prepared for Mrs. Simmons's. He came into her room in his dress clothes while, in compliance with his request, she was getting the jewellery cases out, and would have had her deck herself like a Bond Street window.

"What's the use of it if you can't put it on?" he kept repeating.

"Do you want me to dress myself to look nice or to show how much valuable property can be hung on a woman!" she demanded.

"The brooch cost a hundred and twenty

pounds, and that arrow you've chosen instead wasn't fifty!" he was really mortified and hurt.

"My dear Leopold," she replied, gently, "you have been more than generous, and I appreciate all your presents—you must not think I do not; but the arrow looks better on the lace."

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. Then he had a brilliant idea:

"Well put the brooch in your hair!" he said.

"Don't be silly," she expostulated. "If you want to help me to do you credit, go downstairs, and bring me a white rose out of the bowl under the etching of 'In Love'!"

"Oh!" he exclaimed thoroughly exasperated, "d——d nonsense; you have diamonds that cost hundreds, and you'd prefer to wear

a twopenny flower. I never saw such tomfoolery!"

"I am ready," she answered, "please, don't swear, and the 'twopenny flower' shall be dispensed with!"

They were not yet the possessors of a carriage, and Reece was despatched for a hansom.

Mrs. Simmons's drawing-room proved to consist of three rooms communicating, a pair medium-sized, and one so small that it had been decorated almost solely for effect. The former, which contained a great deal of gilding and gas, and two or three cheap oleographs in expensive frames, were papered pink and white—a pink of the tint of smashed strawberries, traced with an imitation of lace or cream, according to the beholder's fancy; and upon this delicate background little flights of blue velvet

brackets, suggesting flocks of birds, supported infinitesimal sixpenny images from the Lowther Arcade. The tiny apartment at the end, however, had the appearance of a tent, wall-paper here having been replaced by a pastoral cretonne which was quilted overhead to a peak, and amidst whose foliage the coquetries of the Watteau shepherdesses were dimly illumined by the flame of a single burner in a red globe. Viewed from the blaze beyond, the termination of the *suite* looked like the entrance to the "Wizard's Cave" at a fancy fair.

The rosy matron shook hands with Violet cordially. "I am so pleased to see you, what will you play, half-a-crown or five shillings?" she said in a sentence. "Abishua, here is Mrs. Moses."

These people meet for the express purpose of gaming for more than they

can afford to lose; they acknowledge it, and hold it quite a matter of course. To usher in the occupation for which they are congregated by any preliminary pretence of social intercourse would be regarded as affectation and waste of time.

"My wife hasn't learnt to play at all yet," declared Leopold, rather ashamed; "but she soon will, she'll look on."

"Yes," said Violet, "I'll look on, I shall like that."

She sat on the couch beside her hostess. There were no girls present to chatter irrelevantly, and a sudden silence fell, broken only by the flutter of the cards from each of the four sets, for Mrs. Simmons's modesty had undervalued the number of her invitations, and there were perhaps twenty persons all told. Abishua, his nether limbs swathed in mysterious bandages so that one

marvelled he had not gone to bed, lay upon two chairs, suffering the tortures of Erebus, but resolved to play Bluff or die. Then with the first deal the women commenced to talk, but as their remarks were confined to the business in hand Violet was not included.

Primarily entertained by the proceedings she overlooked, after an hour her attention wandered, and towards midnight she found it decidedly tedious. Twice it had been signified that supper was ready, but the players were far too engrossed to heed the intimation, and it was one o'clock before they could be prevailed upon to adjourn. Delighted, she welcomed the tardy movement which she imagined would bring the gathering to a close; she was doomed to be swiftly undeceived. The supper would have been sufficiently extensive for fifty

guests, and consisted of a profusion of everything that was out of season supplemented by indifferent champagne; yet not even the expensive viands and the enjoyment of satisfying their hunger could compensate to the feminine crowd for the sacrifice of abandoning their one pastime. They ate frantically, they gobbled in their anxiety to overtake the tables upstairs before they could have run away far. She contemplated them in horror; the men alone evinced as much respect for their digestions as was compatible with the consumption of rich stews and pastry, and munched their food slowly with evident relish, being ultimately left together by their wives whose impatience to resume the mission of their lives could after twenty minutes' delay no longer be restrained. When at length the male contingent reappeared above, she went

across to Leopold, and spoke to him before he took his seat.

"I am tired," she said, "I should like to go home."

"Rubbish, you can't go as early as this," he answered; "do you want to make yourself conspicuous? Besides, I'm losing; come over here and bring me luck."

Therefore the variety of her evening's amusement was to shift her position from Mrs. Simmons' side to her husband's back, and to watch the men's game instead of the women's. Now and again Abigail Simmons called out an inquiry whether she was dull, which was the signal for somebody from some situation or another to exclaim in a tone of astonishment, "Don't you play, my dear?" but the company, Mr. Moses included, was much too busy to bestow more than passing notice on

her, and for the most part forgot she was there.

"Don't sit right behind me," said a bald-headed sinner abruptly, as in leaning back she had a glimpse of what he held, "it . . . it confuses me."

"I beg your pardon," she murmured, "I'll move my chair."

"That'll do," said Leopold; "you needn't be alarmed, Sam, Bluff isn't one of her accomplishments."

It was half-past two. The drawing-room now looked like a gambling-hell, the women had grown noisier, the perpetual Babel accompanied by the clink of the coins, and at intervals culminating in a yell of triumph or despair, suggested to the disgusted girl another illustration for the "Inferno." On the green baize the piles of gold and silver, the brandies and sodas, and cigar stumps

began to obtrude themselves, as it were. Mrs. Abrahams clamoured for a fresh pack because she "hadn't taken a solitary sixpence with this one, my dear; you may have noticed, not a sixpence." Mrs. Jacob Solomons, who was losing, too, disputed with her sister-in-law, "Mrs. Mike," while such cries as "You haven't put in," "I'll swear you're wrong," "A straight," "Three fives," "Oh, oh, oh," rent her ears, and alone saved her from yielding to the feeling of drowsiness which was attacking her. Here, where she viewed the men, shillings were unmentioned. Where Mrs. Abrahams bet half-a-crown Mr. Abrahams bet a sovereign. Bank notes lay crumpled beside the gamblers, and changed hands with as much counterfeited calm as if they had been farthings. Presently an I O U was written, and someone admitted, casually, to being "a

hundred to the bad." She could not but admire the equanimity with which these men won and lost sums which seemed enormous, unlike their wives never displaying joy nor railing at ill fortune, even while it appalled her, even, too, while she questioned what liberality there could be in one of them presenting his wife with a gift worth fifty pounds when he was used to seeing a similar amount go out in a pool.

Half-past three: would it never end? Her eyelids were heavy with sleep. The incessant hum of "Better," "Better," the eternal iteration of the query, "Don't you play, my dear?" sickened and bewildered her. The atmosphere was laden with the fumes of tobacco, oppressive to suffocation with heat. Those of the women who were losing had ceased to rummage their pockets

for their powder-puffs, and kept them lying beside their purses in readiness for use.

Half-past four. They did not have recourse to powder at all now, but sat with streaky faces glaring at the cards like so many nervous devils. She heard a reference to breaking up; it came from an old woman who was winning, and meant to finish under advantageous conditions or know the reason why, and she felt she could have hugged her from the force of gratitude. The "reason why" was the majority of the losers, and the impartiality of the hostess; the old woman was over-ruled, and the game went on.

All *réunions* of a different stamp to the one described are to a vast section of the Jewesses unknown — unknown at least as much as these revolting spectacles are unknown to the gentlepeople of their

persuasion, for they are acquainted with their existence only by rumour. They have been informed that ladies and gentlemen meet, and dance, and listen to music, and manage to amuse themselves without gambling, but it sounds perfectly incomprehensible to them. They ridicule such "eccentricity," and speak pityingly of its martyrs. "Music and conversation" is a funny allusion amongst them, an expression not to be taken literally, but merely a phrase full of humour by which they imply that a visit paid to some house proved dull.

The clock struck five. Six!

Outside, the cabmen who had been waiting for two hours and more, and in whose adjacent rank the residence was notorious, had collected in a group upon the pavement, and were aspersing the "—— Jews," from whom they would presently reap half-a-

sovereign each, and when at length these "representatives" of the Jewish community (save the mark) dispersed and came out into the daylight, the brute of beef and beer whom Mr. Moses hailed, grinned at the beauty of Violet with precisely the same mixture of contempt and admiration that he would have cast on a handsome "fare" he had picked up at the door of the "Cavour." Instinctively she drew her wraps closer so that they hid her face.

The breeze blew deliciously fresh after the heat within. As they sped along the silent roads in the early morning there was a promise of spring in the air, which made her think of fragrant lanes, and open meadows, and a river winding its dreamy course under sweet boughs.

"Oh," she said, softly, "I am so tired, Leopold."

She leant her head upon his shoulder like a little child.

"I am so tired," she murmured.

"Yes, infernally stupid these evenings are, to be sure," he answered. "I lost fifteen pounds, and about two hours in bed is all I shall be able to get. I wish this fellow would drive faster! What sort of a time did you have?"

She was picturing Chester as it would look when the sun rose. The river's song had got louder, and she fancied how it would feel to be standing beneath the trees again by the boats.

"What sort of a time did you have?" he repeated.

She did not reply; the head upon his shoulder rested more heavily; and, glancing down, Mr. Moses saw with surprise she was asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

Once more the sunshine was stealing in upon the gaslight. Under the dining-room chandelier lay the *débris* of lobster shells and barley sugar castles, the litter of pine peel and withered bouquets. Mr. and Mrs. Moses stood sleepily confronting each other amid the scene of their late housewarming, a gorgeous reception to which upward of sixty invitations had been issued, and where the supper had been supplied by an eminent firm of confectioners from the vicinity of Baker Street. It had, indeed, been a gorgeous reception. Twelve hours ago Violet

had watched the servants setting up the card-tables in the drawing-room, and Leopold had inquired whether the grand piano could not be pushed further out of the way, since another table might have gone into its place so easily. There had been "tables" in the library (?) too, for the men, and "tables" even in the spare bedroom, such of the furniture as stamped it as a sleeping apartment having been removed, and the marble washstand replaced by an extemporized *buffet* bearing a bottle of whiskey, two of brandy, and a box of cigars. Leopold had discovered they did not possess enough tables, and had bought four more. His purchases had comprised the necessities, while she looked after the adjuncts. She had ordered the blossoms from the florist's—the azaleas, and hydrangeas, and the roses. He had sent

home six dozen packs of cards. The dining-room alone had been denied the company save for the purposes of supper; the hired waiters, under the supervision of Friar, their chief, arriving at two o'clock with cartloads of plate and comestibles, and requiring privacy for their preparations.

In compliance with her lord's strenuous requests that she would not, by holding herself aloof from the gamble, provoke comment at their first entertainment, Violet had sat down at one of those many tables, the baize of which was edged by tortoise-shell and ivory purses, and taken her initial plunge into the distractions of Bluff. Now the last of the guests had gone; the rumble of wheels could still be caught on the silence. Husband and wife stared disconsolately at each other across the wreck

of the repast, the rows of half-emptied glasses. He was thinking, ruefully, what a deuce of a lot it had cost, the crowd at thirty shillings a cover, and the wines and the decorations. She was remembering the sudden thrill of disgust she had felt about three a.m., when, in dealing, she had chanced to notice her fingers, grimy with handling the money, and realized that she must look as odious to a spectator as any one of the women who had appeared so revolting to herself at Mrs. Simmons's only a fortnight ago.

Both sighed drearily.

"What did you do, my dear?" said Mr. Moses, stifling a yawn.

"I lost five pounds," she said; "and you?"

"I lost forty," he answered. "Go on to bed, I'll turn out the gas."

She always recollected that incident. In the future, when she was wearily waiting for some similar affair to finish at Mrs. Solomons's or Abrahams's, or Rosenstein's residence, as the case might be, she always fancied the host and hostess gazing at each other despondently when everybody was gone, and asking, with a gape, "What did you do, my dear?"

"I lost five pounds."

"I lost forty. Go on to bed, I'll turn out the gas."

It seemed the natural termination of a Jewish party, the domestic epilogue to the public comedy, and the picture invariably came to her so that she smiled sometimes, though scorn was in her heart.

Flung without a restraining hand into a circle where gambling was almost the *Alpha* and *Omega* of the programme of amuse-

ment, the chances were nearly equal whether cards became her passion or her detestation. They speedily became the latter, for, having primarily conceived an aversion to them, the frenzy with which she saw them so continually welcomed merely served to deepen dislike into abhorrence. If her acquaintance with them had been made more gradually, or if there had been any refinement about the proceedings—some glamour cast over these meetings, where friends assembled for the avowed purpose of carrying away each other's cash, and obviously grudged the delay of greeting one another first—it is possible she might in time have grown as enamoured of the vice as they. She might, with years, have degenerated into a vulgar matron whose earlier thoughts crossed her mind only as some vague fantastic dream in an occasional headache begotten of a reple-

tion of Bluff, and the indigestion of a "brown stew." She might have been much happier. But the naked hideousness of the thing frightened her, and, as it was, she grew simply more self-contained and a shade captious.

She was resolved she would never play again, and had told Leopold so. He had chaffed and remonstrated by turns, but whether he called her determination the timidity of a little miser, or absurd affectation, she was firm.

"I do not like it," she declared. "I have said nothing against it, but I do not like it, and I do not wish to play."

"Very well," he replied; "please yourself!"

He was not exacting, and if she preferred to spend the evening when they went out in turning over the pages

of a stray periodical instead of diverting herself like the rest, why, it was an odd form of enjoyment, he considered, but there was no particular reason for him to object.

It became by degrees perfectly understood that her part in all the *réunions* was a passive one, and when they were included in the list of couples asked to some impromptu affair, which generally occurred two or three times a week, he argued the point with her no longer, nor did the hostess reckon "the pretty Mrs. Moses" in her arrangements for the games any more, being aware that as an onlooker she would not count.

It was not lively, the tedium of long nights with weary eyes in a heated atmosphere, relieved by the stray periodical; even the thought that in her isolation

from the others, she, at least, looked the only lady in the room, was not remarkably sustaining after a while; but she went to make this disregarded audience of one quite uncomplainingly, and the more stoically, perhaps, from the *solitude à deùx* at home not being that sympathetic intercourse to which any interruption comes as a nuisance solely because it interrupts. On the contrary, the theatre which they visited sometimes was a delight to her.

Saturday evening, from an unexplained cause, is the one which Maida Vale customarily selects for the gratification of its theatre-going propensities, and in the world of love and sentiment behind the footlights she forgot the Jewesses in the stalls around her—forgot reality, facts, and her husband, and was already happiest when

she forgot. Most of us are if we come to think about it, but it is a bad thing for a wife of a few months when oblivion is her happiest state.

The pleasure, too, of the stage had its alloy, or, rather, a sequel which was frequently depressing: Leopold's tastes lay in the direction of comic opera and burlesque, and when she had urgently advocated a drama instead, the complete absence of kindred ideas between them was always manifested to her again on the way back. What had charmed her had invariably bored him; what he termed "jolly," had, in her opinion, been a blot on the performance.

After a Shaksperian revival once, she got into the livery-stable brougham glowing: the poetry had mounted to her brain, and was stirring her imagination

like wine. She was still as enthralled as she had been when the curtain fell five minutes ago.

"What a melancholy infliction!" was his criticism.

"You don't think so," she said; "you can't!"

"Don't *you?*" he cried. "No—don't you? You do!" He supposed she was joking.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; only the monosyllable.

Her enthusiasm, which had just been seeking vent, fled, scared, dripping with cold water. She felt as lonely for a minute as if he had turned her out of doors. Silly—but women are like this. And he continued complacently to inquire whether she meant it or not, whether she had liked it really. Seriously

now, had she liked it? she hadn't, surely?

An unreasoning anger took possession of her under the fire of these reiterated interrogations, so that she clenched her hands in the dark and beat them in silent desperation against the cushions. What did he comprehend? she asked herself passionately. What sort of companion was he? Was there nothing upon earth that appealed to the man, save his eternal Bluff? And then she caught the flashing of her diamonds upon her wrist, and questioned where her gratitude was, and took it out, and analyzed it, and weakened it a little more. Gratitude, which is like a root in its capabilities, but must not be pulled up for us to see how it is getting on!

How amazing were the demands she

made upon the shrivelling sentiment on Sunday mornings, and how insufficient was its response! Her notion of her duty as his wife had allowed her to forego Divine Service; it would even keep her waiting on a sofa beside the cards from eight p.m. to five or six next day—sometimes her own sofa, sometimes as a guest on someone's else—but cards in the morning she could not accustom herself to view equably. It was a recent institution, and when on Sundays now some bearded familiar of Mr. Moses's arrived (usually a foreigner, with a name ending in "ski," whose appearance suggested that he had just left his organ outside), and they settled down to a two-handed encounter lasting from eleven to four, she was bitterly resentful.

"If you are not at business, you are

playing cards, Leopold," she told him. "If you are not playing cards out, you are playing cards at home. If you are at home and not playing cards, it is because you are asleep!"

"Ah," he said—"ha, ha!"

His sense of humour was peculiar, and he thought she meant to be funny.

Scarcely had the church bells rung than the little table would be wheeled upon the rug between the windows, and the Polish gentleman with the unpronounceable cognomen ascend the steps. She was not bound to remain, of course, but it is doubtful whether she was a gainer by retiring. The empty soda-water bottles on the cloth and floor struck her as looking far more common when she returned than they would have done had she seen them opened one by one; and

the cloud of tobacco-smoke in the air flavoured her dinner much more unpleasantly than if she had sat still and grown acclimatized before it was served. It was all the reverse of congenial either way.

And she had few or no resources. In her dejection there was but one grain of comfort: her husband's acquaintances had been cordial, and shown themselves ready to receive her as one of themselves. If she never could be, if it was impossible for her to know sympathy with them and their pursuits, or to fill any but the typical position of onlooker she occupied at their parties, it was still a relief to discover that the animosity she had originally dreaded existed only in the fancy of Mrs. Rosenstein, and that, vulgar as these people were, they were

good-hearted. Yet *how* vulgar! Which of the fourteen-stone Jewesses in ruby velvet and black satin could ever develop into her friend! Ugh! but it was dull!

Occasionally she would remind herself how secluded her life had been, trying to believe her judgment was at fault and that she was too ready to condemn, but her beautiful eyes were clear-sighted, and she could not persuade herself the habits and customs which shocked her so unspeakably were the popular diversions of ladies and gentlemen. Instinctively she knew that this section of society was singular and nasty. And if her amiable attempt at self-deception had succeeded, what good would it have done her? They would have sickened her still. The satisfaction she might have derived would have been to reproach herself,

while she shuddered, for being unreasonable. Truly a desirable result! Picture to yourself a Christian gentleman, dependent for companionship upon his wife's introductions, married to a Jewess from this set. The blushing bride's nights are given up to gambling directly she has rushed him back to town from the honeymoon; the leisure moments during the day are devoted to gambling, too; his house is transformed into a miniature "hell." Presume (only no man would be so unselfish) he also accompanies her to mesdames the posse of an evening, although he does not play cards, and patiently sits in an arm-chair, while he is half dead with sleep, awaiting his queen's pleasure and the sunshine. Suppose all this, if your conception can go such lengths, and then ask what right she will have left herself to complain by-and-by when her

husband seeks his consolations, and remember while you answer "none," that what applies to the husband applies to the wife, both being mortal and both made of the same material, though twenty worlds required the woman's to be the stronger of the two.

One afternoon, when from sighing over the "Telegraph" she had gone for a stroll in the neighbourhood, Violet met Mrs. Rudolph Jacobs, who had been ordering confectionery at Botting's. The average Jewess's capacity for consuming cakes can only be compared to the *sang froid* with which Miss Jonathan can demolish a pound of sweets—in *American*, "candies."

"Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Moses? Isn't it lovely weather!"

They walked together along the street.

"Won't you come in, my dear?" as they

reached her door. "Do, it must be ghastly for you at home, all alone. Come in and have some tea."

"Thank you," replied Violet, "I will."

Mrs. Jacobs's house had been arranged with considerable pretensions to taste—not considerable taste, but considerable pretensions. It was vastly superior to the Simmons's, but, while avoiding the ignorance of which they were guilty, it bordered upon the other extreme, and in its profusion of *portières* and screens was slightly reminiscent of a theatrical "set."

"Take this rocking-chair," she said, "and make yourself comfortable. Oh, by the way, can you use two tickets for a concert at St. James's Hall this evening? We can't go, and if they are any good to you, they're at your disposal."

"Why, yes—that is, if you are sure you can spare them."

"Oh, Rudolph has asked a client up to dinner; we should have had to let them waste. Indeed, I only took them to oblige Mrs. Benjamin—the Palmeira Place Benjamins—it is the concert of some *protégée* of hers. Santley is going to sing, I believe, and several big people. Will you have them?"

"Yes, certainly; thanks, very much."

"Here you are, then," said Mrs. Jacobs. "Hallo, come along."

The servant, who was attired like a *soubrette* in a farcical comedy, had entered with the tray, and the two women were immediately united in a temporary alliance over the teapot.

Even as Violet was being pressed to try some "stuffed monkeys," though, there was

a knock at the front door, and the *tête-à-tête* was broken by the arrival of visitors.

They were Mrs. Moss and her sister, Mrs. Hart. The momentary familiarity vanished before the influence of this new element. There was now a group around the hearth, and the *soubrette* brought in more cups and saucers, and a further supply of almond pudding. Bonnets, babies, and a breach of promise case, which was just then attracting public attention, were the topics discussed, and Violet created profound astonishment by declaring she could not understand a girl going into court and claiming money of a man to assuage her disappointment at not being married by him.

"There can only be one estimable quality in her character," she said: "her courage—and that is audacity."

"I can't agree with you at all," dissented Mrs. Moss; "I think she is thoroughly right. She has been engaged to the fellow, and taught to anticipate a comfortable position, and then he coolly cries off and leaves her no more advanced than if she had never accepted him."

"'Advanced,' 'a comfortable position!' Of course, as a speculation, she has been wasting her time. All I maintain is, that a girl must have lost her self-respect before she can admit to the *fiancé* and a thousand other persons that she *has* been regarding the marriage as a speculation!"

"I don't see it," said Mrs. Hart. "Why should she be the sufferer, and he go scot-free?"

"I don't consider she is a sufferer," answered Violet, "she escapes. Her suffer-

ing would have come if he had married her unwillingly."

"Well," remarked Mrs. Jacobs, "you must own it is an awful slight upon a girl. Fancy her mortification and her dear friends' giggles!"

"Certainly it's a slight, but the public exposure is a disgrace. It does not stop her friends giggling because the world laughs!"

"But she gets the money," cried Mrs. Moss, "the money, the money. You keep forgetting the damages."

"Oh, she takes her wounded sensibilities before a judge and jury, and says, 'A man on better acquaintance has come to the conclusion I am not sufficiently lady-like to be his wife. His decision has robbed me of half my *amour propre*, and to show you how terrible this loss is, I have only brought

myself to sacrifice the other half for the chance of making three thousand pounds.' What a delicious proof!"

"A girl's good looks are her stock-in-trade," asserted Mrs. Moss. "A man can go into business and make a fortune; a girl can only marry one. If she's got fine eyes, that is as useful as the man's industry in the City; if she knows how to use 'em, that's the same as the man being smart. Every intelligent woman seeks to establish herself advantageously, and for her to have her fine eyes monopolized during one of her best years by some young larrikin who backs out afterwards is a wicked shame."

"If a man could do such a thing without having to pay for it," added Mrs. Hart, "he would be engaged to a different woman every six months. You bet he'd find it very agreeable to propose to a girl, and spoon

her while she was a novelty, if he knew he could incidentally observe later on, 'On second thoughts, you don't suit!' Why, now, just listen——"

"What do you say to a game for an hour?" inquired Mrs. Jacobs, feeling in her pocket.

! ! !

The argument fell dead on the instant. In precisely fifty-five seconds three hands had dived for three purses, the cards had been produced, shuffled and dealt, and before the minute was up, somebody had said, "I'm in, my dear."

Violet returned to the "Telegraph" and her own drawing-room. When her husband came in, she showed the concert tickets to him. "It doesn't begin till late," she said; "you can even dawdle over your coffee. You will go, won't you?"

"If you want to," he replied, "I don't mind. We can dress after dinner, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Who is this Mrs. Benjamin Mrs. Jacobs spoke of? Have I met her?"

"Mrs. Sholto Benjamin. No; she has been on the continent somewhere, I think. You will meet her, though. I know him; he is in Mincing Lane, and I'll get him to make his wife call. They are big swells, the Palmeira Place Benjamins—two flunkeys with powdered hair. I shall try to get thick with them."

"How does Mrs. Jacobs know them if they are such 'swells'? She said she only took the tickets to 'oblige Mrs. Benjamin.'"

"Oh, they aren't exactly tip-toppers, either," he explained. "I meant they've

got a heap of money. Besides, Rudolph's wife was only bragging. Mrs. Benjamin doesn't visit her; they may have seen one another, perhaps, that's all. The Benjamins don't play cards much; our set isn't good enough for them, and the Jews they want don't want them."

She was thinking of the music she was to hear rather than listening to his definition of Sholto Benjamin's position. Imperceptibly she was acquiring the habit of asking him a question and attending but partially to his response. And this would be the first affair of the kind she had ever been to in London. She was really excited at the prospect, so that when he remarked, lazily by-and-by with his slippered feet upon the fender, "I say, do you want to go particularly, Violet?" the query was something like the blow a child experiences

when her mamma says she has a headache on the morning of the pantomime.

"Don't you?" she said, blankly.

"I am very comfortable as I am," he confessed. "It's raining, too, isn't it?"

"No," she said, "it is not raining."

He crossed his legs, and looked at her doubtfully.

"A concert isn't wildly gay. I can't say I'm sweet on going unless you are anxious."

"I should like to go," she averred. "I am passionately fond of music, but I won't drag you out if you are bent on staying at home."

"Yes, let us stop at home," he said, after a pause; "I'm awfully tired this evening, my dear. St. James's Hall won't melt."

"All right," she rejoined; "it doesn't

matter. As you say, St. James's Hall is always there."

But she turned away her face, and hummed a little tune. She had wished to go very much.

Now about nine o'clock, when Mr. Moses' snores were substantiating the statement that he was tired, and while Violet was listlessly perusing a novel, a telegram was delivered. The noise made by Reece in closing the door after her awakened the sleeper, and he asked what it was.

Violet uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"From Mrs. Simmons: 'You and husband are to come round for an hour. Quite small.. Mind, relying on you.' How polite to write 'on you,' seeing I never play; it should have been 'on him,'" she com-

mented, tossing the missive aside. "Is it necessary to telegraph that we can't come?"

He picked it up and read it.

"I don't know; we might go round for an hour," he suggested. "What do you say?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"I thought you were so exhausted?"

"I never said I was 'exhausted.' Don't exaggerate. I've had a nap, and I feel fresher."

"Well," she said, coldly, resuming her novel, "then accept the invitation if you want to; there is nothing to prevent your going."

He stood glowering at her furtively and twisting the envelope into a spiral.

"What do you mean by that," he demanded abruptly, "that *you* won't go?"

"I?" she said, indifferently; "most assuredly not!" And over went a page of the book.

"Look here," he expostulated, "you are simply retaliating, Violet, that's what you're doing. I thought you were a cut above that sort of thing!"

"I am not retaliating," she exclaimed, vehemently, "I am not! I do think it is selfish of you to want me to sit up all night watching you gamble, though it was too much trouble for you just now to take me to a concert; but why I refuse to go is because I am sick of the cards—sick to death of them; because I despise the women who play, and despise myself when I am amongst them. It is horrible. For the men to bet as they do is bad enough, but for women to sit gaming away till dawn, with dirty hands, is revolting. They can't even call upon

each other without playing; it is their one resource—they haven't any other idea!"

The colour went out of his cheeks, and he stared at her stupidly. Unobservant by nature, the gradual alterations which had been affecting her temperament since her marriage had passed by him unperceived, and now that they were forced upon his notice, the man was bewildered by what seemed a sudden mutation of personality to him—a mental metamorphosis instead of a revealed development.

"You are very enlightened," he retorted, after a second; "where did you learn so much? In Virginia Square? The evenings were rollicking there, upon my word!"

"I should hardly cite my experience in Virginia Square as an example of anything that was agreeable. But I none the less

consider such 'entertainments' as Mrs. Simmons's disgusting."

"Then have the kindness to keep your opinion to yourself," he replied, wrathfully. "Who are you? You were such a great lady six months ago, were you not, with your designing aunts and blackguard father, that you are too fine for me and mine now?"

"Oh don't," she said, "don't!"

She put up her hands with a little deprecating gesture. Her irritation had evaporated in the heat of the one outburst, and the reaction already set in. Subdued, she longed for him to go away and leave her to be quietly wretched by herself.

But she had assailed the set in which he had been born: his sister was in it, his mother had belonged to it, and to show an *habitué* scenes in the aspect they wear to a novice is impossible. He was bitterly

incensed, and he taunted her with Robert Dyas's career, incidents of which had been reported to him; he told her much that he was sorry for afterwards, and more that was untrue. And, finally, he accused her of sneering at him all the time in her heart as "the Jew."

"That I should have married to hear my wife abusing my religion to my face!" he cried.

"What you say is ignoble and false," she said; "leave your religion aside, I have never mentioned it, you know I haven't!"

"You said we were 'revolting, disgusting,' you 'despised' us—you . . ."

He had worked himself into a state of frenzy.

"I said the cards were fearful—so they are; I loathe the parties! If I said I despised the players, I forgot your sister was one of them. I am sorry."

There was a petition for peace in her voice, but it is easier to raise a storm than to allay one. He was not only an angry husband, he was an insulted man championing his class against the attack of an alien, and that the alien was his wife intensified his humiliation. Another thing, too, goaded him on and rendered him remorseless: he felt that in the first instance the fault had been his own. Half an hour later:

"Who on earth could have dreamed she had such a devil of a temper!" muttered Leopold. He was in high dudgeon in a hansom.

"What madness was it made him think he loved me?" moaned Violet Moses. She was in the dining-room in tears.

END OF VOL. II.

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